

ROLOFF BENY

# INDIA

AUBREY MENEN





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India is very old, but also very new: an immense country with a long, troubled history and deeply rooted traditions, yet at the same time a young, vigorous nation seeking its own path in the modern world. The fascination of India lies in its extraordinary variety and in its inherent paradoxes—both visual and intellectual.

For Roloff Beny, India is an experience on the highest spiritual level. During travels covering some twenty thousand miles on the ground, he has sought to evoke this impression with his incomparable photographs of the astonishing terrain, the temples and monuments, the diverse population of this vast country. With the same artistry and sensitivity of vision which characterize his recent images of Japan (awarded the Gold Medal for the "World's Finest Book" at the Leipzig International Book Fair in 1968) and Canada, Mr. Beny gives a timeless portrait of India, with its layer upon layer of history, its assimilation of varied cultures, its enormous vitality and its endurance.

Aubrey Menen, one of the most entertaining and distinguished contemporary writers, entitles his essay "The Indians: as they were, and as they are". This is a witty and profound analysis of a complex civilization which has been frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted. Balancing the deep affection of familiarity with the objectivity of the outsider, Mr. Menen writes with revealing authority of India's background and future, its religions and philosophies, its attitudes, accomplishments and foibles. His prose provides a striking counterpart to Mr. Beny's photographs. Together, these two highly individual artists have produced a book which perfectly combines their gifts to form a unique work of art.

With 136 color plates  
16 decorative motifs





















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। सूर्यस्य ज्योतिर्लोकं तत्र तत्र तदाह तदाह तदाह ।

*The light that lives in the sun,  
Lighting all the world,  
The light of the moon,  
The light that is in fire:  
Know that light to be mine.*

From the *Bhagavad-Gita*, translated by  
Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood

1251



# INDIA



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designed and photographed by

ROLOFF BENY

with 136 plates in color, 17 decorative motifs

essay by

AUBREY  
MENEN

McGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY  
NEW YORK



*The Thrones of Earth and Heaven*  
*A Time of Gods*  
*The Pleasure of Ruins*  
*To Every Thing There Is a Season*  
*Japan in Color*

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Pierced marble screen with a design of flowers: from the Hall of Private Audience in the Mogul Palace at Delhi. Built by Shah Jehan — the builder of the Taj Mahal — between 1639 and 1648	2
The lotus: a symbolic flower in Hindu religion and philosophy. It was also used widely as an architectural motif, as it was amongst the ancient Egyptians	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Grille from Fatehpur-Sikri, a royal town built by Akbar, and later abandoned. The grille is from the tomb of Shaikh Salim Chisti, a celebrated Moslem saint who died in 1571	8
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Map drawn by Hanni Bailey	

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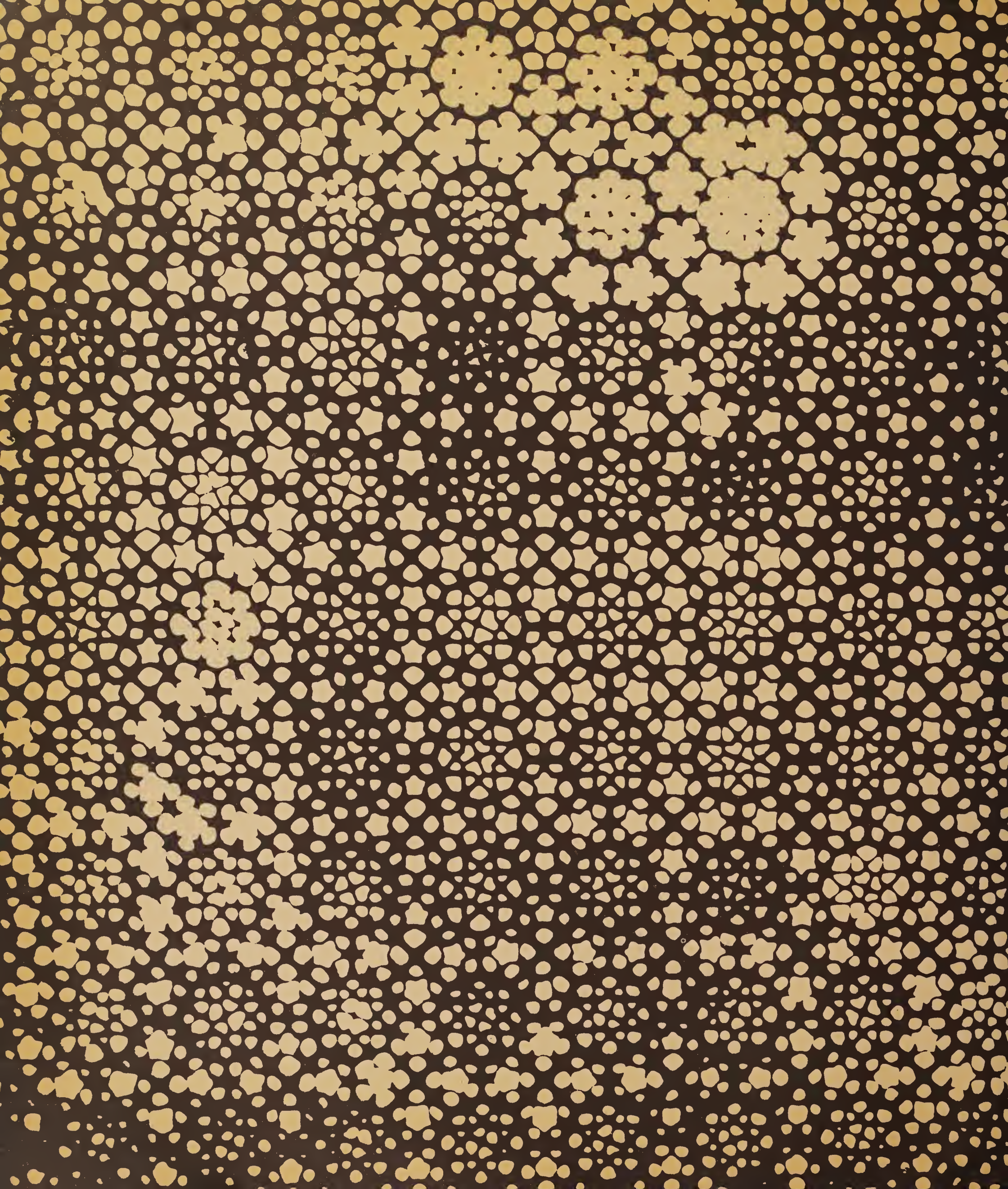
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# Roloff Beny

## Foreword and Acknowledgments

*For Peggy Guggenheim,  
my devoted mentor and friend of twenty years  
who shares my love of India and accompanied me  
during much of the exploration*

INDIA is the title of this book. I have reflected for over a year in search of a provocative word or phrase for a title, but no word or paragraph or even a set of books could say more than this one word—INDIA. The word has resounding corridors of meaning and endless vistas of imagery, and is as rich as the imagination can stretch.

Encountering India is even more bewildering and rewarding than the study of its archaeology and elaborate history. To photograph India was an inescapable temptation to me as an artist, but the personal discipline required in the selection of material was as painful as surgery, more so than for any other country I have photographed.

Every geographical area could command a book in itself. Each period of its history would require numerous volumes. A portrait of its people, who number one-seventh of the world's population, would be a task without end. The life in the tiniest village in Rajasthan is worth a visual essay in itself, and I long to do a volume on the Howrah Bridge in Calcutta, which is a microcosm of all the anguish and hope of the human race. Would the painter or poet find the challenge any less awesome? And what about the writer? What has been written would fill a library. In spite of these monumental odds, two chroniclers offer the reader their impressions; my role is to provide a visual odyssey.

The photographic projection of India is a task requiring foresight and careful preparation, and for this, as for all phases of my project, I was aided most generously. To write an acknowledgment, however, is almost as difficult as finding a title. For those in particular whom I would like to name for their warmth and perceptive cooperation, their indispensable assistance, there would not be space.

My project, long contemplated, had its beginning in my own country, Canada, where Mrs Robert Chisholm and sympathetic Indian friends there aided me in initiating the first steps. However, my first homage is to the people of India themselves, enriched if divided by their many languages and dialects. For me, they are the anonymous actors constantly on stage. Then I wish to express my great debt to all those whose informed and efficient counselling within India eased my overwhelming task of learning to know their country. My first exploration overpowered me, but, like the acquired taste of the mango fruit, the magnetic obsession drew me back, and, over six years of migratory returns, I ultimately travelled more than 20,000 miles of Indian terrain from the Himalayas to beyond the Tropic of Capricorn.

India is an individual experience and a universal encounter. There are countless ways of seeing it, many approaches to it: Mr Menen's views are as personal as mine, and on reading his essay I find that his interpretations of India differ from my own. For me, it is white lotus, sacred cow dung plastered on trees and mud houses, myriad naked children with eyes like dates and dazzling smiles . . . and always the psychedelic colours of the bejewelled women decorating the landscape and walking with the grace of Ionic columns, even with babies clipped to their waists like clothespins; jasmine and marigolds woven in ebony hair, and the ever-present mongrel dogs which roam the vast sub-continent; near-naked coastal fishermen as graceful as the Hindu gods in bronze, the hours of dusk and dawn silhouetting the Hindu *gopuram* and Mogul dome, and the incessant odour of sandalwood . . . and always I shall remember the trees of India—the jacaranda in flame, the frangipani, the flowering mango.

But there is always more to India beyond this panorama. There are the monuments and mystic equations, left by ancestors and invaders, which are as multiple as the intricacies of their races and religions and as diverse as their awareness. Not to have encountered this whole tapestry is to be denied the great measure of human heritage which is INDIA.

Rome 1969




# Chronology

BC		AD		AD	
1500	Hymns of the <i>Rig-Veda</i> probably current	1556	Accession of Akbar	1906	Foundation of the Moslem League
600–300	Probable period for the composition of the <i>Upanishads</i>	1605	Accession of Jehangir	1920	Mahatma Gandhi leads non-cooperation movement
487	Death of Gautama Buddha	1615	Sir Thomas Roe obtains trading privileges from Jehangir for the British	1930	Civil Disobedience Movement. First session of Round Table Conference
467	Estimated date of the death of Mahvira, founder of Jainism	1628	Accession of Shah Jehan	1931	Second Round Table Conference: Gandhi in London
332	Accession of Chandragupta Maurya	1646	Destruction of Vijayanagar	1937	Provincial autonomy begun: Congress ministries in the majority of Provinces
326	Alexander the Great crosses the Indus River	1658	Captivity of Shah Jehan	1942	Civil Disobedience: arrest of Indian leaders
273	Accession of Asoka	1659	Accession of Aurangzebe	1943	Subhas Chandra Bose organizes Indian National Army and fights British forces
257–6	The Fourteen Rock edicts of Asoka	1680	Death of Sivaji	1944	Gandhi-Jinnah talks in Bombay
242	Publication of the Seven Pillar edicts of Asoka	1702	Amalgamation of the English and the London East India Companies	1946	Indian Naval mutiny
232	Death of Asoka	1757	The battle of Plassey	1947	India becomes independent
AD		1774	Warren Hastings becomes Governor-General	1948	Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi; death of Jinnah
320	Rise of the Gupta dynasty	1835	Macaulay establishes education in English	1950	New Constitution of India comes into force
1190	Rise of the Hoysala dynasty	1853	Railway opened from Bombay to Thana; telegraph line from Calcutta to Agra	1952	First General Election
1336	Founding of Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar	1857	The Sepoy Mutiny	1955	Hindu Marriage Act; inauguration of atomic reactor
1469	Birth of Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhs	1858	British India placed under direct government of the Crown	1959	Kosi Barrage begun
1498	Vasco da Gama lands in Kerala	1877	Queen Victoria proclaimed Empress of India	1964	Death of Pandit Nehru
1510	Albuquerque occupies Goa for the Portuguese	1885	First meeting of the Indian National Congress		
1526	Battle of Panipat; beginning of Mogul rule				









A conversation piece between some of the deities in the Hindu pantheon. 2  
From left to right, they are Kartikeya, who rides on a peacock, Parvati, a goddess who rides a lion. She is talking to her husband, the great god Siva, whose mount is a bull. Behind him the cheerful, domestic god Ganesh who, in spite of having an elephant's head, rides on a mouse. Kangara painting from the collection of the Maharajah of Jammu and Kashmir



# PROLOGUE





# THE INDIANS – AS THEY WERE AND AS THEY ARE

## *Introducing an Unknown People*

NO MORE THAN TWO DECADES AGO, a British comedienne would come on to a London stage dressed as a lady lecturer in a loose black gown. She would take a sip of water, hitch up a shoulder strap, clear her throat, and utter the word 'India'. The audience would burst into a roar of delighted laughter.

Why did they laugh?

They laughed because India was a notorious bore. The lecture—which, of course, never proceeded—could only be about things which everybody knew and nobody wanted to hear again. India was a 'sub-continent' (whatever that meant) inhabited by a rather excessive number of brown people. These people incessantly worshipped three thousand gods, would not kill cows, and even more eccentrically, would not kill human beings. They were divided into rigid castes that forbade all social progress. Women were treated as chattels and wives had to walk seven paces behind their husbands. From this benighted mass of people only two figures emerged—Mahatma Gandhi, who was a saint with the peremptory habit of refusing to eat when he could not get his own way, and Jawaharlal Nehru, who regularly ate three meals a day and was a thorough gentleman. These two, with approximately 400,000,000 fellow-countrymen, statistically made up one-fifth of the human race, but it could not be said that it mattered very much.

Nor was it only the British who held these opinions. The Americans thought much the same way, but they were more open-minded about it. They were eager to learn something new of India, provided it was about Yoga. The French, who leave their universities knowing everything, also knew all about India. To the usual list they added the fact that Indians were mystics. Visiting Indians, like myself, who complained that they were not mystics were merely told in rapid French that they were.

The Italians, emerging just then from twenty years of Fascism, knew rather less than the Americans, the British and the French, as they knew rather less about everything else in the world. But they had a deep and affectionate admiration for the Indian people, whom they regarded—and still do—as a most generous and gallant race. This was because of an immensely popular series of adventure stories for boys, which the author had set in India, a country to which he had never been.



To the Germans, they were, of course, Aryans, a subject which, twenty years ago, the Germans were rather anxious to forget.

This was the climate of opinion in Europe and America in August 1947, when I was telephoned in Bombay, where I was struggling with my second novel. The call was from New Delhi and the caller was of undeniable authority. In two days, he said, India was to be declared independent, and the whole occasion was threatening to go flat. Would I come to the capital and by means of a radio commentary on the ceremony of the transfer of power, inject some enthusiasm into the proceedings? Although I had developed an intense aversion for the microphone and was happy to be free from it, I felt I could not do less than my patriotic duty: besides, if I did not lose my voice at the crucial moment, I would be the very first Indian to do it. I agreed, with the proviso that I went about it entirely in my own way.

The atmosphere was, indeed, far from stimulating. I had barely arrived when I was summoned into the presence of the future Prime Minister. I found Jawaharlal Nehru with his feet on the casing of a portable piano, surrounded by four or five people with very worried expressions. They were choosing the Indian national anthem, which, as Jawaharlal remarked with considerable irritation, everybody had forgotten about except himself. Several tunes were played: one was selected. I have often had occasion to feel that our little group was not at its best that day, but that is beside the point, the point being that nobody suggested that we choose a hymn dedicating the new country to Siva or Vishnu, or Brahma.

I woke up on the great day with a feeling of gloom. I did not relish facing a microphone again, and I have all my life detested ceremonies with elegantly dressed people. I went for a walk in what we would call today a Maoist mood. I went down by the market in the Old City, and mingled with the peasants who had come to sell and buy, dressed in their threadbare jackets and tattered loin-cloths. I made up my mind that at least one of these would see his country become free, and see it from a front row seat.

I chose a tall, dignified peasant of some thirty years, with soiled clothes and a huge, boat-like slippers of rough leather. He was called Ram Lal. He was not unduly impressed by being invited to Viceregal Lodge (as it would be called for a couple of hours more), but he said that it would be pleasing to tell his son he had seen Pandit Nehru close to.

At the due time Ram Lal and I walked up the broad steps of the Viceregal Palace, Ram Lal making a great clatter with his vast slippers. At the top was a British functionary, splendidly attired. He gazed at Ram Lal as though he were Gabriel with his horn, ready to sound the Last Trump. Then, sensibly deciding that it was the end of the world, anyway, he waved him into the marble halls.

The place was crowded. 'They look', said Ram Lal, 'so very *washed*.' Ram Lal still had the mud of the fields on his legs. We had to push through a number of people. But the washed did not withdraw, shrinking, from the unwashed. There were no indignant glances, as there would have been in such a ceremony in any other capital, including the Kremlin. I suppose a muddy peasant must, some time, have been at a Presidential reception at the White House, but probably before the British burnt it down, not after. Ram Lal even met Nehru. Jawaharlal



was wandering in an abstracted mood about the corridors, followed by a shuffle of gorgeously uniformed bodyguards, trying hard to keep step behind the errant Nehru. Peasant and Prime Minister gravely saluted each other.

So Ram Lal squatted on the marble floor amid the Brahmins and the washed of the land, quite undisturbed by anybody, and watched India become free. He nearly missed the climactic moment. He was nodding off to sleep. He had been up since three in the morning. It was a long walk from his little hut to the market.

That evening the people celebrated in the streets. There were no religious processions: no cocks were sacrificed, no melted butter poured out. Nobody lay on nails. It was all a very secular affair. It was even more secular in Bombay. Although the national anthem had been forgotten, somebody had designed the national flag—quite wrongly, as it turned out. But right or wrong, some sharp person had seen the chance of a fast rupee, and manufactured a million or so of them. On the great day, it rained. The colours on the flags ran. The sight of them caused anger and mirth, but nobody said it was an omen from the gods.

Then the leading brains of this spiritual, religious, mystical people got together to draw up a Constitution. The first thing they decided was that India, constitutionally, was to have no religion at all. It was to be a secular state. As for that other hallmark of the Hindu, the caste system, they made it a punishable offence to treat any citizen as an untouchable.

The West continued to think that it knew all about Indians. But there was a rude awakening in store. As we can see from Pearl Harbor, Red China, Vietnam and other places, the West's contacts with Asia consist very largely in rude awakenings, and this one was particularly bitter. The Portuguese would not leave Goa, so Nehru sent in the Army to chase them out. The Western world was thoroughly shocked. It was not so much that armed force was being used to settle a dispute: after all, it was being used for that purpose in half a dozen places round the globe. The trouble was that it was being used by Hindus. Everybody in the West knew that this was all wrong: Hindus were pacifists who believed in non-violence. Yet here they were, shooting at the Portuguese, just as though they were a bunch of Christians. Commentators wondered aloud what Gandhi would have said, meaning, of course, that they knew perfectly well. In fact, they did not. Gandhi was dead, but he had made himself quite clear on the point before he died. He had said, 'I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.' Gandhi's official title is 'The Father of his nation', and Gandhi knew that one of the privileges of a good father is to be thoroughly inconsistent if he thinks the family needs it. The Army went on to fight the Pakistanis and the Chinese, not by praising God but by passing the ammunition. Then Nehru died and the land where wives walked behind their husbands became the first large modern state to be governed by a woman.

Who, then, are these unknown people? How do their minds work? Why do they work in such unexpected ways? These are the questions I shall try to answer in the pages that follow.



- 3 The great god Siva, dancing. The devout Hindu does not see this as a statue with many arms: he sees the god displaying, as it were in a film, each of his many powers or attributes. Note the garland offered by a worshipper. From the Menakshi temple, Madras





- 4,5 (Below) A gilded statue of a Jain divinity, from Ahmedabad. Jainism arose at much the same time as Buddhism, as a heretical sect of Hinduism. A puritanical faith, some of its followers were 'sky-clad', or naked. Jains are noted for their extreme reverence for all forms of life. Not only do they not kill animals for food, they sometimes even wear masks over their mouths in order to avoid killing small insects while drawing in their breath. They do not believe in the existence of gods in the Hindu sense. Their faith centres round a series of saintly men, semi-divine in their powers, who are their teachers. These teachers are held to go through several incarnations. Statues of them are shown on the right, carved in the living rock below the fortress at Gwalior



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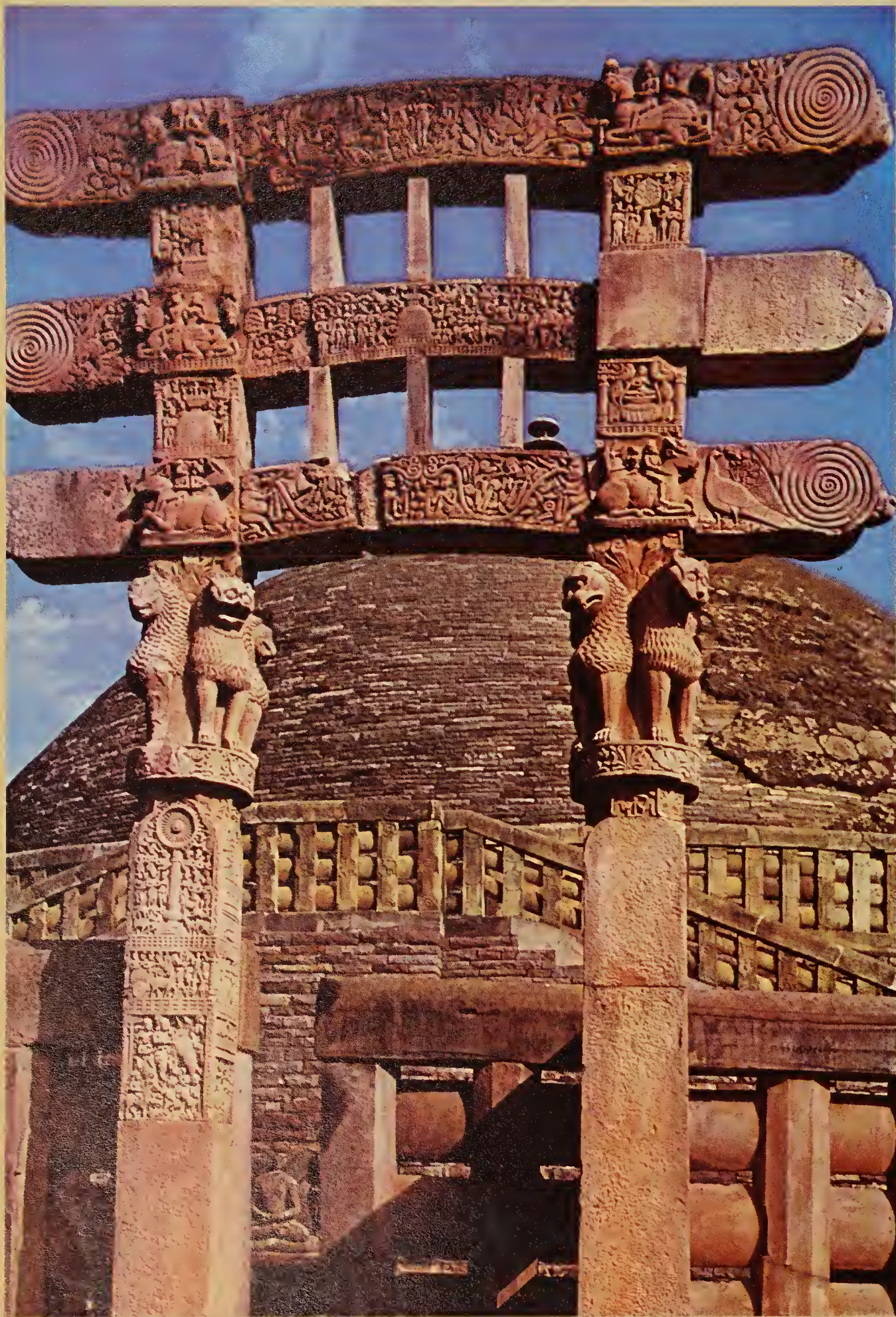


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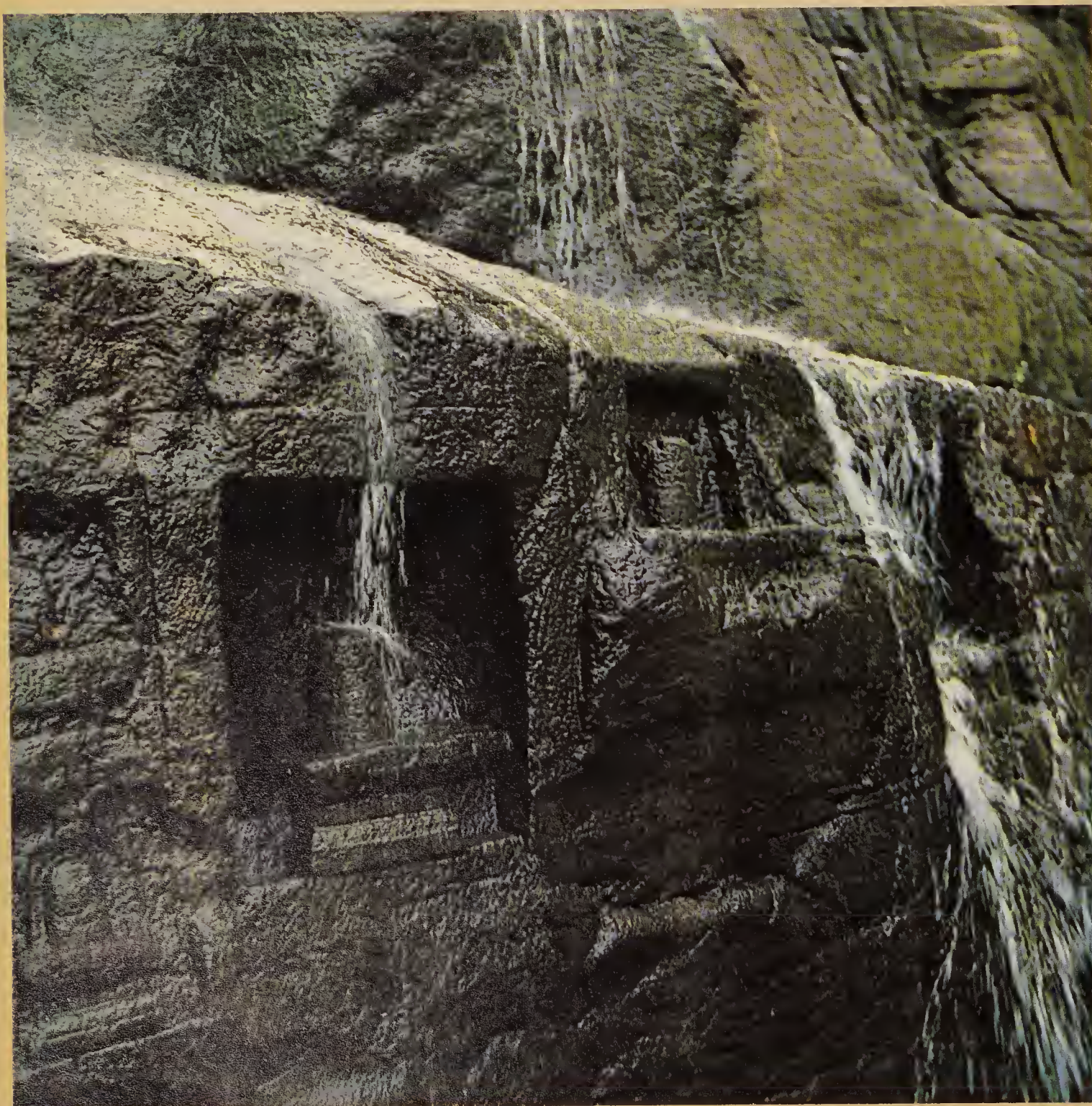


- 6 The south gate of the stone railing surrounding Sanchi Tope, one of the most beautiful Buddhist stupas, or shrines, in Asia. The middle lintel shows a visit of the Emperor Asoka to another shrine
- 7 Sarnath. The great stupa and other shrines. It was here that Buddha preached his first sermon. Deserted for many centuries after the overthrow of Buddhism, it is now once again a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists, who come almost entirely from outside India. Buddhism can no longer be regarded as an Indian religion, since contemporary Indians find little appeal in its forms and rites





- 8 The lingam. It is a representation of the penis, and it symbolizes Siva, one of the major gods of the Hindu faith. Phallic worship existed in India before the coming of the Aryans. It was adopted by the Hindus about the beginning of the Christian era. But although it forms part of the Hindu ritual, the Hindu is not obliged in any way to reverence it. He may worship any god he pleases: he may even worship none at all. He has no pope or bishops or council to lay down his faith. He is required to follow certain social customs, and, until recently, to observe the regulations of the caste system. 'Hinduism' is therefore a misnomer since a systematic Hindu religion does not exist. The orthodox Hindu, on the other hand, clings very firmly to the beliefs which he has selected from the vast quantity of alternatives that the faith offers him







- 9 The Trimurti, a colossal statue in the cave at Elefanta, an island in Bombay harbour. It shows Siva in his three manifestations as Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. The attempt, once popular, to see in it some Hindu form of the Christian notion of the Trinity, is mistaken. Trinitarianism had a temporary vogue in the Middle Ages among intellectuals, but never took root



# ONE

The sun setting over the great central plain of the Deccan, in Andhra Pradesh 10



# The Look of the Land









# How India Is Not So Old as Some Indians Say

SRI PUROHIT SWAMI, dedicating his translation of the *Gita* to Sri Sayaji Rao Gaekwar, says that the book was ‘revealed’ five thousand years ago, to which statement he adds ‘according to our Indian tradition’. By this he means that the figure is a lot of nonsense, but since it is very flattering nonsense, he does not mean to give it up unless he has to: and he is obviously sure that the Gaekwar of Baroda will join in the game.

It is such a satisfying game. For two centuries Indians, in a fix when arguing with Westerners, have gone one up on them by saying that, after all, Indians were civilized thousands of years before anybody in the West, and the Westerner, abashed, has agreed. It is likely—though not certain—that the Indians invented arithmetic but it still remains something which few people like doing. The result is that the myth that the Indians are the oldest civilized people in history remains firmly in our minds, both in the East and the West. Visiting statesmen rarely fail to mention it. The truth is that any Jew who is reading these words and still observes some Jewish customs belongs to a civilization which has its roots far deeper in the past than any Hindu. Neither, in my opinion, has anything much to boast about. The antiquity of a culture means practically nothing. An old man of ninety can claim that he reached puberty before any of his listeners: but it is not going to do him much good.

As everybody knows, the history of Hindu India began when certain tribes of people who sometimes called themselves Aryans came down from Central Asia (or thereabouts) and took possession of the northern plains of India (then, as far as we know, called nothing whatever). These people made no tombs, built only in wood and thatch, and could not write. They therefore left nothing behind them for posterity except a collection of mainly religious songs which, many centuries later, was written down and thus preserved. It is called the *Rig-Veda*.★

When I was a boy in Kerala, I was taught to hold the *Rig-Veda* in great reverence, not by my family but by the Nambudri Brahmins I encountered, who are devoted to it. It was shown to me in the form of inscribed palm leaves, dried, and held together with string. I was duly awed, although, of course, I never read a line. I have found that highly educated people in the West are equally awed by the book, and, equally, have never read it.

Now, the importance of this book is that the Indians base their claim to the antiquity of their culture on it. They have to, because there is no other evidence.

Buddh Gaya, where Gautama Buddha found enlightenment while sitting under a peal tree. Buddh Gaya, which is in Bihar, is a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists from all parts of the world. It is also held to be holy by Hindus, one sect of which worships Buddha as an incarnation of the major Hindu god, Vishnu

★The spelling of Indian names is, in mid-twentieth century, in a state of utter confusion. The English, who originally transliterated them, listened with a tin ear. ‘Benares’ is just plain wrong. ‘Banaras’ is a little better but still not right. ‘Varanasi’ is quite correct, but only when said by an Indian who speaks English with a heavy Indian accent. So we are back where we started from. Years ago I changed the spelling of my name (Menon) to something nearer the actual noise my Kerala family made. As a result, Indians still firmly spell my name with an ‘o’ while Americans spell it with a double ‘n’, after the shaving soap. I doubt whether the entire topic matters in the least. To write Rg-Veda for Rig-Veda gives the impression, I know, that the author can read the text in the original, something very, very few people can really do. In what follows, I use spelling as a means of communication.



Yet, after the most strenuous efforts of scholars, the earliest conjectural date that can be put upon it is 1500 BC, one thousand years after the flowering of Sumerian culture and two thousand years after the unparalleled splendour of the Old Kingdom in Egypt.

There is, however, Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. These are two ruined cities, unearthed by contemporary archaeologists, that date back to about 2500 BC. They flourished, that is, about the same time as the Sumerians. For a while this discovery raised high hopes in patriotic Hindus that the two cities were final proof of their ancient roots. Unfortunately, the spade has uncovered nothing which proves that the inhabitants were Aryan. Worse still, there is some evidence that the Aryans, coming down like a wolf on the fold, destroyed them forever.

I shall now examine, briefly, the *Rig-Veda*, to see who these Aryans were.

But first a word of caution. The *Rig-Veda* consists, as I have said, of hymns and chants meant to be used in religious worship. To find out what sort of people used them, one must ferret about in them for casual hints. It is not a very reliable process. Let us imagine an archaeologist some thousand years after World War III coming across a copy of *Hymns, Ancient and Modern* in the ruins of New York or London. He painfully translates some verses. 'We plough the fields and scatter/ The good seed on the land.' He concludes that he is dealing with a people devoted to agriculture. 'And it is fed and watered/By God's Almighty hand.' This is precious evidence that artificial irrigation was unknown. The people were, clearly, in the primary stages of settled agricultural life. The further verses are even more illuminating. This primitive people worshipped a God of the weather, who sent snow and sunshine which were responsible for 'all good things around us', conclusive proof of the basic simplicity of the economy.

Undoubtedly the congregation in, shall we say, St John the Divine or Westminster Abbey sang these words. What they were thinking about them—or whether they were thinking at all—is another matter. We cannot tell from the *Rig-Veda* alone what degree of religious fervour prevailed among the Aryans. Certainly they did not put all their eggs in one basket. Another book has come down to us, the *Arthavaveda*. It is a collection of near-incomprehensible spells to be used against daily misfortunes (such as snake bite), presumably if the gods proved unreliable.

The picture that we do get is banal, although it is not good manners to say so. They were fighters and hunters. They liked riding horses. They danced. They sang. They drank. It happens that Homer described his characters as doing the same things. This has led some scholars to the astounding *non sequitur* that they were Homeric men with an epic quality, but that need not detain us.

## *The First Real Indian*

A THOUSAND YEARS OF INDIAN HISTORY PASS—without any history at all. We have no ruins, no inscriptions, no royal tombs, no statues of kings, no shrines. We must still make do with books. The later *Vedas* are composed, then the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*. The first sketches of two long poems are, perhaps,



put together, but they are certainly not written down. We can see that something very important is happening: a change is coming over the land, but we have no human characters to watch as the scene is played. We have only figures that clearly belong to legend and not fact. We have profound thoughts, but they are expressed by faceless philosophers. We are at sea and all we know is that a storm is blowing up.

Then, in the sixth century before Christ the first real Indian suddenly appears, and he is a colossus. He towers so much above ordinary mortals that Westerners, and even Hindus, are inclined to forget that he was, in fact, an Indian, and very much so.

His name was Gautama, called the Buddha, and there again we have someone about whom everybody already knows everything. Worse, people are inclined to be touchy when they are told anything new about him, while Buddhists, as I can confirm from long experience, are inclined to fall into most unbuddhistic rages. I can understand why. He is one of the most appealing figures in the whole history of religion. He inspires in millions the same devotion as is raised by Jesus of Nazareth. The trouble is that he, personally, unlike Jesus, was not a religious man at all. This most extraordinary person turned his back on the whole idea, an action which was to have no parallel until Voltaire.

Having said that, let me break off to see just where we are in historical time: the brief survey will also provide a little interval in which tempers may cool. I have taken the year 1500 BC as the beginning of the story. Between that date and the death of Gautama, some of the greatest empires of the ancient world have risen and decayed. Carthage has been built, Rome has been founded, Tiglath Pileser III has destroyed Babylonia and founded the Assyrian Empire. The Israelites have been deported, Sennacherib has come and gone, and so has Nebuchadnezzar. Cyrus has conquered Babylon, Cambyses has taken Egypt, Darius has ruled from the Hellespont to the Indus. The battle of Marathon has been fought, and three years later, in 487 BC, Buddha left this earth, as a result, according to one tradition, of an acute attack of indigestion. It will be seen from this that when the real history of India starts with its first world figure, a lot of history had already finished outside its borders. The Western world (which is founded on the civilization of the Greeks) and the Hindu world (which takes its first clear shape in the time of Buddha) are contemporaries.

It has been the custom, when writing about Buddha, to point out that Pythagoras, Zoroaster and Confucius were all active much about the same time as he. From this many writers go on to state that some sort of spirit of religious innovation was moving mysteriously among all mankind. Since the ideas of Pythagoras, Zoroaster, Confucius and Buddha have absolutely nothing in common (and are even, at times, violently contradictory) such a statement is mere foolishness.

But at this point it is better that I define my terms. The word 'religion' covers an almost infinite number of things, but I think we are all clear as to what we mean by it. A mere belief in something that cannot quite be proved—that the universe began by an explosion, for instance—is not a religion. Faith in a view of things—that all is for the best, for example, in the best of possible worlds—is also not a religion. It needs a faith in some power superior to the human race:



God, Jehovah, twenty thousand Gods, the Sun, the Sky. But it needs something else. The *élan vital* is superior to the human race, since it is held to drive mankind, willy-nilly. But Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* is not a play about religion. *Saint Joan* is. The extra thing is that the devotee should be devoted. He should be humble before his God or gods, and in some way or other, if only by sitting silently in a meeting hall with his hat on; in short, he should worship. Without these things, the word 'religion' is emptied of any real meaning, as when we say, 'He makes a religion of playing golf on Saturday afternoons.'

Now Gautama, as is well known, left his palace, his wife and his family to go off into the jungle and to meditate on life as he saw it, because what he had seen of it had perturbed his spirit. After practising austerities, he gave them up as useless. He reverted to pure thought and in due course discovered what he was looking for. This is called the Enlightenment, from which he got his name, Buddha, The Enlightened One. Obviously, he did not give this name to himself. His awed disciples tacked it on to him. The result is to give the impression that Gautama had some sudden vision, some mystical illumination, some glimpse into the heart of things. Maybe he had a glimpse, but what delighted him was to discover that in the heart of things there was nothing at all. This nothingness he called Nirvana, which is not a place (except according to an obscure Japanese sect) but a state of the spirit, with the proviso that in that state, there is no spirit left. He described the condition as one of total release. It was approached by a whole series of minor releases—from desire of any form, from anger, from preoccupation with the things of the world, from the wish to do harm, and so forth.

Emerging from the forest, he began to teach. Now to teach is to immerse yourself in the world at its most earthy—namely, a daily bunch of students, eager, stupid, argumentative, overenthusiastic and marvellously uncomprehending, as any teacher will know. Thus Buddha's mission (for it was nothing less) was a contradiction to his own discoveries. But it need not trouble us. These difficulties are found in the lives of all men of great originality. To any person who reads the New Testament with care, it is plain that Jesus, who taught a new way of living, was also convinced that all ways of living were shortly to be abolished by the Second Coming, which he told his disciples to expect in their own lifetime.

Buddha could never have made such a prophecy. Nirvana had no place for the gods. It is considered offensive to his memory to say he was an atheist, so I shall not do it. He himself was more telling. He simply ignored the gods. He never mentioned them: they did not even have an unspoken place in his doctrine. Neither did priests or worship. He taught that the only way to receive release was to follow the Enlightened Path. This was a list of the right ways to live, and since it recommends gentleness, refraining from taking life, help to one's neighbours and the avoidance of anger, it has always appealed to people of good will who long for a quiet life and wish everybody else did, too.

But this misses the whole point of his teaching. The eight right ways of acting should be followed, *not* because it would make you a good, kind person, *not* because it was morally better to be gentle with your fellows, not for any *end* at all, except to secure your final release from having anything to do with the human race at all—its hates, its loves, its fears, its superstitions, and its gods and ceremonies of worship.

A man with something as new as that to say finds his St Paul all too soon.



A religion was set up almost as soon as Buddha was dead. In theory Buddha does not take the place of the gods he ignored: in theory there is no act of worship, only that of reverence. In fact, of course, he is worshipped and with great and often noble devotion.

Looking at Buddha with Western eyes for the moment, let us be honest. Once we have escaped from the dazzle of Gautama's personality—a unique combination of high breeding and even higher thinking—we have to admit that his thinking is just a bit too high for us. He wants us to annihilate ourselves and to become Nothing. We can write the word down. We can spell it with a capital 'N', but we cannot really say that we have grasped what Gautama had in mind.

We can conceive of a person subordinating all his egotistic desires and sinking them in some driving purpose. We might think of Florence Nightingale. Unfortunately, when Florence Nightingale grew an old woman, she became a positive monster of egotism whose peremptory letters made Cabinet Ministers tremble. Or to take a higher line, we might think of St Catherine of Siena who had an intense and mystical relation with Almighty God. Humble as she was before her Maker, it led her to bully a Pope, and she was so successful at it that the Pope, who was in Avignon, packed up and came back to Rome. All this is in accord with our suspicions about the more spectacular feats of self-abnegation. We were awed when we heard that a young American, called Thomas Merton, had given up the world to bury himself alive in the enforced silence of a Trappist monastery. We read the stream of books in which he described his experience. We observed that he died while attending a *conference* in Bangkok. We have already noted that Gautama, having found the way to self-annihilation, travelled the country and gave a series of lectures about it.

But for once, scepticism does not serve. If we are to understand the Indian, it is essential to understand this desire to do away with the self, not merely for the sake of being unselfish and good fellows with our neighbours, but for its own sake. It is part of the Indian character. If the Western reader doubts what I say, he has only to turn over in his mind such encounters with Indians as he has had. All goes swimmingly for a time: Indians are a friendly and intelligent race. They seem genuinely interested in you. Then, all of a sudden, when you are well-launched on your favourite hobby horse, they are no longer with you. They look at you, but do not see you: they listen, but do not hear. When they at length return to your company, it is with a maddening air of indifference. My fellow-countrymen may be annoyed with me for saying this, but only because I am telling tales out of school. After all, it lends an air of mystery to one's personality, and that has always been a social asset. Not that the Indian withdraws deliberately. He cannot help it. It is in his blood. It is in his history.

The beginnings of that history are, as we have seen, contained in books, and I now propose to examine one of them in an attempt to explain what Gautama (and, as we shall see, other people of his time) were meaning.



# *The Bhagavad-Gita and the Earnest Young Lady*

THE WHOLE WORLD HAS HEARD OF the *Bhagavad-Gita*. It has been translated into a great number of languages, sometimes by silly geese, sometimes by men of talent.\* It has had an unfortunate history in the West. Being very short, it has been frequently published in leather-bound editions to be slipped into the pocket as a source of spiritual solace for people of refined sensibilities, a sort of intellectual's Gideon's Bible. Read superficially, it can serve as that: read with attention, it is a highly disturbing poem.

The setting is an ancient dynastic war. The opposing armies are drawn up in battle array, awaiting the signal to begin the fight. The two speaking characters are Arjuna and his charioteer, who is also the god Krishna. It happens that as a result of a family brawl of long duration, Arjuna sees that fighting on the other side are many relatives, together with dear friends and preceptors of his boyhood. He himself is not a man of great intelligence. He is an athlete and a champion archer. But he has a tender heart. He cannot bring himself to kill his own kith and kin, and, weeping, he tells Krishna so. Krishna begins by saying that Arjuna should fight for his own side, no matter if it meant a good deal of killing, because that was his plain duty. If he did not, men would call him a coward, and that is an unbearable insult to a soldier. The poem ends with the same advice, but a good deal goes on in between.

It should be noted first that the poem is a literary masterpiece, among the greatest ever written. The author has constructed a design so smooth and subtly put together that the reader is really not conscious of what is happening as he reads. The writer's intent is to carry the argument, step by step, away from the first propositions (which any General Staff would heartily approve) to a point where the reader feels there is no reason for doing anything, much less make war. Then, after some bravura writing of astonishing ability which aims at nothing less than presenting the whole of creation in a few verses (and in which, for me, he succeeds), the author brings the discourse gently down to earth again.

Krishna discusses the nature of action. He says there are two sorts. The first is the action we do for the sake of rewards—wealth, happiness, the good opinion of our friends. This is inferior. The better sort is the action we do for no reward whatever. We do it, quite indifferent to whether we gain anything from it or not. We do not even care whether other people think it right or wrong.

Now clearly, if we are not going to consult other people about what is moral for us to do and what is not, we are free to invent our own code of right and wrong; in other words, to do just as we please. But the fact that Krishna has just proposed complete moral anarchy goes unnoticed, so beautiful is the style.

Arjuna, in a touch of high art, interrupts to say he is getting muddled. If there are two sorts of action, then he understands the first—to fight, in order not to be thought a coward. But what of the second?

The second turns out to be a very strange affair. The wise man acts only to get rid of the feeling that he is tied to action. He does everything with a sublime indifference. He will appear a good man to others, kind, loving, generous, but

\*Conspicuous among these latter being the above-mentioned Sri Purohit Swami.



only because it is much more bothersome and entangling to be bad. He does all this from love. Love of whom? ‘Of me,’ says Krishna. And who is Krishna? The god replies by growing gigantic. ‘I am everything that there is,’ he says, in a moving and beautiful canticle of creation that has no equal except, perhaps, in the songs of St Francis of Assisi.

But if Krishna is everything, then he is also the person who is acting. ‘Just so,’ says Krishna. The whole point of existing is to cease to exist as a person and lose oneself in Krishna, or, in plain words, to lose oneself in everything.

It was once reported to Thomas Carlyle that an earnest young lady had exclaimed: ‘I accept the universe.’ ‘Gad!’ said Carlyle, ‘she’d better.’

## *The True Meaning of the Upanishads*

THE GITA, WE HAVE SEEN, touches a complete antinomianism in morals, but it comes down, in the end, on the side of the General Staff. This is probably due to the fact that it forms part of an epic, and for the sake of the story, the fight must go on.

The philosophers who wrote the *Upanishads* were under no such constriction. They are perfectly free pieces of philosophical speculation and for those who believe in law and order and morality, they are an unnerving example of how far a philosopher can go when he is given his head. It is a pity that successive editors have toned them down. To know what the original versions were like would be as interesting as hearing a tape recording of what Diogenes really said as he sat outside his tub.

We cannot be sure when they were first compiled. Some are very early, and there is reason to think that the theory they put forward was in the air at the time of Gautama. Indeed, if he had not been so determined to teach, he may very well have stayed under the Bo tree and contented himself with throwing off an *Upanishad* or two.

As for the sages of the *Upanishads*, they refused with scorn to set up monasteries or schools of instruction. They consented to take disciples, usually, it would seem, only one or two at a time. The word itself means ‘Sit down beside me’, and that is exactly what the pupil had to do, together—and this is made very clear—with keeping the sage’s cooking fire going and seeing that there was something in the pot to cook.

The doctrine they taught was about the *atman*. I detest books in English about India which are sprinkled with Sanskrit words, and I let that one in with reluctance. But the trouble is that the *Upanishads* were translated before the rise of modern psychology, and *atman* was always rendered as ‘the soul’. It is a word which instantly spreads a fog in any discussion, and, as a result, the cold clarity of the *Upanishads* was misted over. We can get a better view today.

*Atman* means the self, or, as psychologists call it, the Ego. Sigmund Freud distinguished three parts of the self—the Ego, the Id, and the Super-Ego. The *Upanishad* sages said that if you really wanted to know the truth about things, it was useless to ask the priests, silly to make sacrifices, and unprofitable to sit listening to the usual run of philosophers. You had to begin to operate on your



own mind, on your own self. You asked yourself the question, 'Who am I?' First you did away with your Id, the seat of your basic appetites and passions. These could not be the essential you because *you* can control them. Besides, your passions are not permanent. Sex comes and goes, a fact which is the cause of a great number of our brawls and unhappiness. The Ego goes next, for your ambitions, your self-doubts, your strivings are not wholly yours—they depend on what other people think and do, especially what they think about you. Next the Super-Ego must go. He is a fine fellow, he studies philosophy to find out the secrets of the Universe; he controls your passions; he keeps you good. But where is he when you are asleep? When—to bid goodbye to the Freudians—you are in a dreamless sleep? No part of your mind is at work, but *you* are still there. Or are you?

Yes, say the sages, you are still there, and it is the real you as distinct from all the false selves that go about in your name. You are in a place which they call the space within the heart. You may enter it by taking thought (not by meditating) and peeling away your egos, one by one.

The space within the heart, they said, is the place you find in yourself when you have rejected everything which is not exclusively you. From this space you can survey the whole world, including your worldly self, with complete detachment. So neutral are you that in the end you ignore it completely. You lose the whole world, that is, in order to gain yourself. The matter, say the *Upanishads*, cannot be further explained.\*

The sages said that the aim of the wise man was to find this space. It should be observed that their teaching is utterly destructive. When you withdraw into the space within the heart, *nothing* matters: neither morals, nor noble aims, nor good deeds: neither does depravity, nor low aims, nor bad deeds. Religion, love, hate, progress, even philosophy are all equally of no importance whatsoever. Within the space the wise man attains tranquillity and happiness, provided happiness is not thought of as anything we experience in the world of men.

The attraction of such a belief for a person who thoughtfully observes the world around him is so great that for a thousand years or more, other Indian philosophers have been trying to damp it down till it is harmless. The *Vedanta*, so much studied in the West, is, in part, an attempt in that direction. But the spark has never been put out.

The notion that the true end of living is to withdraw from it completely has fascinated all intelligent people who have taken the trouble to read the *Upanishads* with attention. It is a revolutionary idea, and, as the sages point out, a very practical one. The disciple who has learned the art of withdrawing into his inner self can leave the space whenever he wants to. He can, say the sages, go back into the world and 'rejoice in women and chariots'. But he will do so with the detached smile of a philosopher who knows what women and chariots, and all the rest of the world, are worth. And that is—precisely nothing.

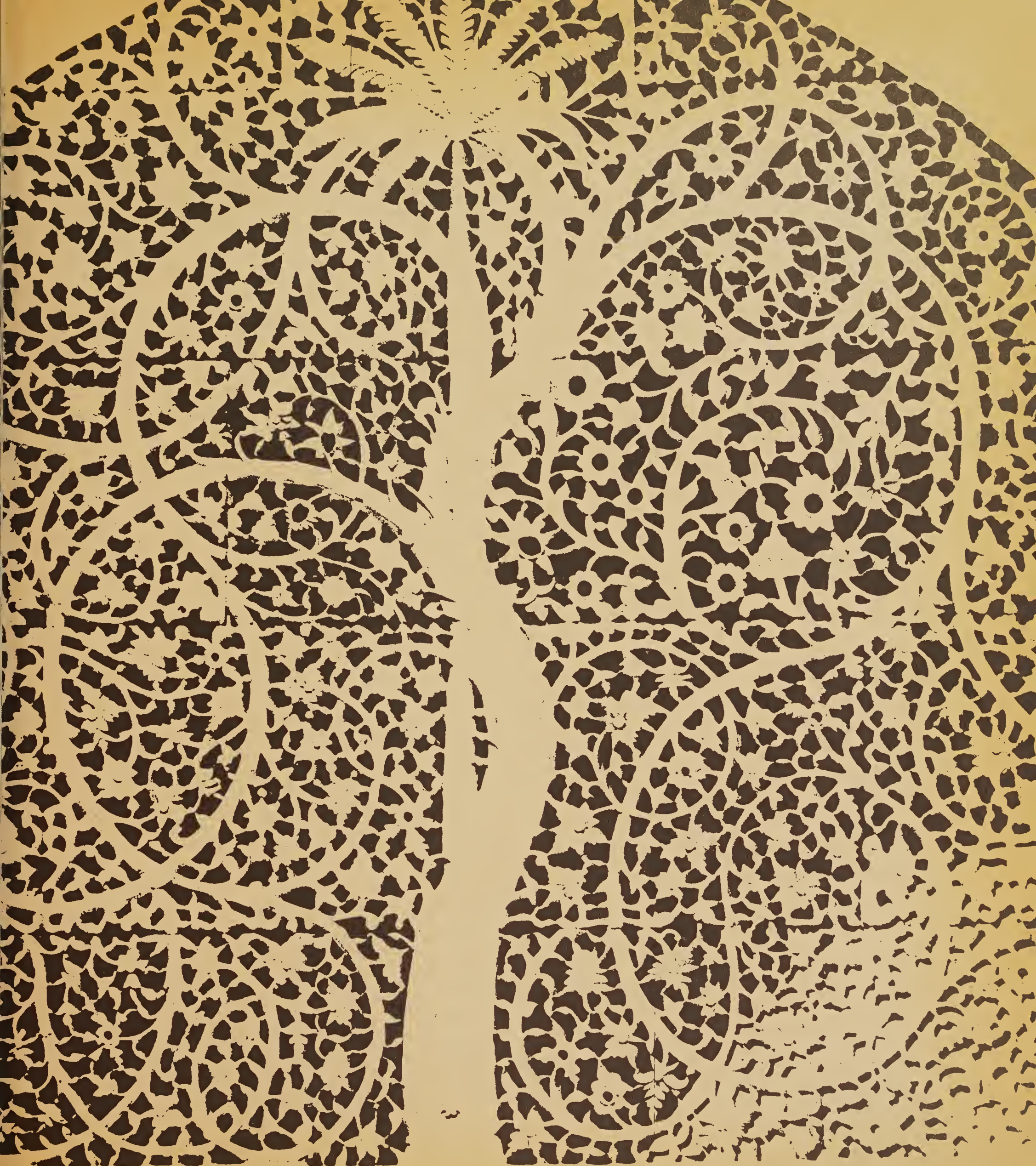
No one can understand the Indians unless he remembers that they began their history by producing two philosophies which carried nihilism as far as it can reach. No other race has ever done that.

\*Nevertheless, in my book *The Space within the Heart* (New York and London 1970), I have developed the theory along lines of my own and applied the result to the solution of some of our contemporary dilemmas.

Pierced stone window : from the  
Sidi Sayyid Mosque at Ahmedabad.  
The tracery of these windows is much  
admired, and is considered by some  
critics to be finer than anything to be  
found in Agra or Delhi

(Overleaf) Persian mirror inlay work  
from the island palace at Udaipur.  
These intricate tree and flower motifs  
surround the bathing pavilion of the  
Ranee's private apartment















Dead forest in the Periyar game reserve in South India. The reserve is famous 11  
for its herds of wild elephants

Monsoon clouds over the plains near Jammu, Kashmir. Failure of the monsoon 12  
to bring rain may mean famine conditions over a large part of India, and, as yet,  
cannot be predicted. Photographs of the earth from outer space may finally  
put an end to this age-old problem

An avenue of poplar trees, descendants of those planted by a Mogul Empress. 13  
The invading Moslems complained bitterly about India being a land without  
gardens, and worked at getting things more to their taste, which had been formed  
in Persia

Village temples among the palms on the road to Tanjore. This area is one of the 14  
most beautiful in southern India

The Western Ghats, seen from the road from Tinnevely to Cape Comorin. 15  
The Ghats are a range of mountains, almost entirely covered with dense,  
tropical forest

Cherrapunji, in Assam, is one of the world's wettest places, the average annual 16  
rainfall being 426 inches. These waterfalls, seen at the onset of the monsoon,  
are some 2000 ft. high











































# The Mahatma Meets Mr M. K. Gandhi

I BROUGHT THE LAST SECTION TO A FINE, resounding conclusion. The Indians had invented two nihilistic philosophies that recommended withdrawal from the world. I shall now ask the question that the reader is asking. ‘That is all very fine and large, but do the Indians really believe in it?’

The answer is ‘Yes’. It is also ‘No’.

I shall now explain multiple thinking. This is the first time anybody has explained it to the West, but it must be done. When I have finished, the Indian will no longer appear mysterious. But it is possible that he will appear exasperating.

I shall begin with a very simple example, so that we may take our first steps without tears.

When I was a boy of some thirteen years, my greatest friend was Bala. He was a very handsome boy of my own age, and he took me under his wing. I needed it. He had been brought up entirely among the palms and canals of Kerala, where I was now living. I, for my part, had the misfortune of being educated in England. According to Bala, I was nice but dense. To me, Bala, with his mercurial mind, his easy, careless ways, his laugh and his enormous enjoyment of being alive, was the whole world, and a new world.

Still, we had our tiffs. For instance, he liked throwing stones at frogs. I had been taught by the English to be kind to animals. One day, beside a lake, I told him that if we were to remain friends, he too had to be kind to animals and stop throwing stones at frogs. He replied that if I were to remain *his* friend I would have to stop eating the flesh of poor, dumb goats who had been slaughtered to fill my belly. A coolness sprang up between us that lasted two whole days, until I decided after much thought that logic was on his side. I told him so. I said I would become a vegetarian. He said he thought it would be much better if he continued to throw stones at frogs and I ate my usual dinner. At first, this lax compromise troubled my conscience. I did not like abandoning my principles (to say nothing of the frogs): besides, as I told Bala, he was logically quite right. How could I like animals and still eat meat? He said, ‘Shut up, you ass,’ and took me off to watch some alligators. But the lax compromise worked very well and we never mentioned the subject again. Bala, I understood, did not hold logic in any great esteem.

But he was very fond of schoolboy conundrums. One day, when he was throwing stones at a safe distance at one very old and enormous alligator, he said, ‘If an irresistible force meets an immovable object, what happens?’ My first impulse was to say there would be a deadlock but I quickly saw that it could not be the correct answer. I puzzled about it a good deal, to Bala’s amusement.

I used to ride a horse early each morning. The next day, riding along the beach, I suddenly saw the solution. I was so excited that I galloped to Bala’s house, woke him up from where he was sleeping on the verandah and said: ‘There is no answer to the conundrum, because there is no question. Look: if you say there

Water boys on the South Deccan.  
This system of irrigation has been used  
from time immemorial, with no change  
at all in the simple apparatus



is an immovable object then you cancel out all irresistible forces—phtt!—like that. And if you say “This is an irresistible force,” then it means that there isn’t an immovable object anywhere in the universe. You just simply can’t think of the two things together.’

‘I can,’ said Bala, and went back to sleep.

I returned to England and in due course grew from a boy to a man. I dropped my concern for animals in favour of a concern for human beings, something which caused me no problem, since I did not eat them. In particular, I was concerned for my fellow-countrymen, many thousands of whom were languishing in jail for the crime of wanting to rule their own country. I toured the country raising funds and making speeches. I also made a practice of sitting down when ‘God Save the King’ was played, and, if I may be permitted the observation, was a pioneer in using one’s bottom as a means of protest. By 1931 I had won my spurs as an agitator.

In that year Mahatma Gandhi visited England. He made a great impression on all classes of Englishmen, including those who were firmly opposed to his politics. His charisma was undeniable. His simple, peasant dress and obviously high morals made a strong appeal to the British public. They were, at that time, growing very tired of the Maharajahs. All of them were indecently rich and some just indecent. Here, at last, was an Indian that one could admire. King George V, whom I refused to ask God to save, invited him to Buckingham Palace, presumably sharing the general weariness with Princes.

But there was a difficulty. The Labour Members of Parliament saw in Gandhi the future ruler of India. Since they were equally convinced that they were the future rulers of Britain, they wanted to know what sort of man they would have to deal with. A small and intimate meeting was therefore arranged. It took place in the Bloomsbury apartment of a Labour MP. Not more than twenty persons were present, among them myself, as a reward for my protests.

The Mahatma sat on the floor in a loin-cloth and shawl next to a gas-fire thoughtfully turned up to the maximum. The élite of the Labour Party stood round, or sportingly squatted on the floor like the guest of honour. The élite included Clement Attlee, later to be Prime Minister, Ernest Bevin, later to be Foreign Secretary, and the brilliant Socialist intellectual, Harold Laski, later to make a public fool of himself. I stood in front of Ernest Bevin.

Questions were asked, answers were given, but everybody was too shy, or too respectful, to really badger the Mahatma. Then, in a pause, Ernest Bevin, in his celebrated plebeian accent, whispered in my ear, ‘Ask ’im about factories. Go on. ’E’s against ’em, isn’t ’e? Ask ’im if India is to ’ave factories.’

I did not relish the idea of belling so august a cat, but, like Bevin, I wanted to know, too. Besides, I was the youngest person present. So I respectfully asked the Mahatma if he thought that India, when free to govern herself, should be industrialized. Clement Attlee, who was on the floor, nodded emphatically in approval of the question.

Mahatma Gandhi said he thought that India should certainly be industrialized.

Bevin leaned against me. ‘Go on,’ he whispered.

‘But Mahatma,’ I said, ‘haven’t you very often said that factories are satanic things, and India should depend on a simple village economy? And don’t you



spin cotton on a wheel to drive home your lesson?’

He looked at me piercingly and quite unsmiling.

‘Factories are satanic for *me*,’ he said. ‘The village economy is right according to *my* way of thinking.’

‘Then you would oppose the setting up of factories?’

‘No, not at all.’

‘Well,’ said somebody when the meeting was over and we were outside, ‘you’ve got two people: the Mahatma and Mr M. K. Gandhi. Take your pick.’

Now, the various people in that Bloomsbury gathering were quite accustomed to thinking one thing and saying the exact opposite in public. They were, after all, professional politicians. What surprised them was that Gandhi was in two minds about an important subject and said both of them aloud. What was even more puzzling was that while he agreed it was good for India to have factories, he agreed with equal enthusiasm to the opinion that it would be an excellent thing if she didn’t. It was a difficult state of mind to pin down in words: it was not hypocritical, because Gandhi was hiding nothing; it was not casuistry, because Gandhi was not arguing about anything. It was not even muddled thinking which the politicians, being British, would rather have liked. There were really no words in the English language to describe it. It was, as one of them said, just the Mysterious East at work again.

There was no mystery. Gandhi knew his fellow-Indians as few men had known them before him. He knew that they genuinely admired the simplicity of village life. He knew they enjoyed spinning cotton on wooden wheels. He also knew that a great number of them kept a sharp eye open for a business deal while they did it. Some time later he gave a spectacular demonstration of how sure he was of his followers. The occasion was some highly important talks with Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Moslem Indians. The press, the news-reels and the radio massed to record it. Gandhi chose the setting. It was the luxurious mansion of a cotton magnate called Birla who owned the largest number of satanic spinning mills in the country. Nobody objected. As for the cotton magnates, they steadily gave Gandhi very large sums of money in order to hear him call them names.

But multiple thinking did, in the end, get the Indians into some trouble. It was all right inside the country: but the foreigners failed to understand it. There was, for example, the business of the national flag.

When it was originally designed for the Congress Party, it was made up of three horizontal stripes in three different colours, and in the middle of this was the picture of one of Gandhi’s spinning wheels. At first everybody was very pleased. The colours were gay, and the wheel symbolized that love of the simple way of life so dear to the Indian heart. But while loving the villages, the Indians also were hot-foot after foreign capital to set up clothing factories, steel mills, automobile plants and a nuclear power station. The men who were responsible for getting this, and getting it quick, pointed out that it was difficult to do so under a flag which might have been designed by a Luddite. The spinning jenny had come to stay along with a great number of other complicated machines. Businessmen would be interested in business and not in the village banyan tree.



Another flag was designed. This time the theme was even more high-minded, so high indeed as to be practically out of human sight. A design was taken from the capitals of the stone pillars set up by Asoka, and it was substituted for the spinning wheel. This symbolized a number of exalted virtues, which, if the Indians had really had them, would have laid the country flat at the feet of the Chinese a few years later. Fortunately, as I shall show, the Indians didn't have them, and all was well. The flag still flies.

## *Asoka*

ASOKA WAS A KING who lived some two centuries after the death of Gautama Buddha. He is a great favourite with schoolmasters and every Indian child learns about him at an early age. Asoka was a very good, a very just, a very kind and a very wise man. At least, so he said himself. We have no other evidence of his goodness, it is true, but that is just unfortunate.

Asoka began by being a bad man—or so he says, which only goes to show how truthful he was. He made war on his neighbours. He won the war—apparently he never failed at anything he set his hand to—but when he saw the field of battle strewn with corpses, he was overcome with remorse. He was so upset that he resolved never to make war again. This sudden discovery that in a war people get killed in various unpleasant ways may seem strange: but it would seem that his generals had not thought to forewarn him.

He became interested in Buddhism and even became a Buddhist monk. He adopted the eight-fold path: he abjured violence and meat-eating. He practised kindness and truthfulness, and love of his neighbour. He ordered that all this should be inscribed on pillars which were set up throughout India. As well as drawing attention, modestly, to his own virtues, these pillars also gave advice to the citizens who wanted to follow Asoka's example. They are full of exhortation to virtue, and since sermons in stone might not have been enough, squads of men specially trained in moral uplift were sent around the country to help people rise to higher things. Many of the pillars are still standing today.

The curious thing is that they are scattered over practically all of India except the deep South. This is because Asoka, having renounced arms and force, still managed to set up one of the biggest empires in Indian history. That is to say, potent kings and proud rulers renounced their sovereign sway and paid taxes to Asoka, all without seeing a sword drawn in anger, and solely because of Asoka's noble example and the sermons of the preaching squad. This is a miracle. The Pharaohs were ready liars on their monuments, but they never claimed that they won their victories without the aid of the armed forces.

What life was really like in this vast empire, we cannot say. We may choose to believe the pillars and say it was a Golden Age of peace and kindness and the people were happy as never before and never again. But imperialists always believe their subjects are grateful and that they are loved for their benign theft of other people's property. The British in India firmly believed it, and some dear old souls in Cheltenham and the Balearics still do.



Whatever he really was, Asoka was undoubtedly an expert at promoting a public image. It was this success that led the Indians to put his symbol on the flag. Hindus feel that really, deep down, they are all Asokas, peace-loving, kind, charitable towards others and unwilling to harm a fly.

I shall now take a look into their history and see whether they are.

## *How to Be a Hindu and Fight Like the Devil*

ON A QUAY IN BOMBAY HARBOUR is a large stone structure in the shape of a gigantic triumphal arch. It is called the Gateway to India, and although the traveller to India nowadays usually begins his visit at the airport, in the imagination of the people the Gateway is still India's front doorstep. America's front door has the Statue of Liberty. There is also a statue behind the Gateway to India. One would imagine that it would be of Mahatma Gandhi, or at least Asoka, but it is not. The statue portrays a warrior on horseback, armed to the teeth. He is one of the great heroes of India.

His name was Sivaji. He was a younger contemporary of Oliver Cromwell and in many ways he was like him. He burned with religious zeal, and he was a born soldier. Like Cromwell he early made up his mind to rid his country of a tyranny that outraged his religious beliefs. He was a Hindu. The rulers of his country were, in large part, Moslems. Although he was only a son of a petty chieftain, he made war, in his own way, on the Mogul Empire.

Like all good soldiers, Sivaji had an eye for a good fighting man. He belonged to a clan known as the Mahrattas. They were—and still are—a short, wiry race, stubborn, brave, and without imagination. Sivaji saw that such men, if they were trained, would make excellent soldiers, provided they were never asked to use their brains. Sivaji had enough brains himself for a whole army: so that all he had to do was to put the Mahrattas under a tough military discipline.

He also observed that the Mahrattas lived mostly in the mountains. The mountains had flat tops and steep sides. They therefore made excellent strongholds. Thus, he had the men, and a position of strength from which they could fight. The only thing that was lacking to make war was money.

He got this in a direct, soldierly fashion. He turned his new army into an organized, disciplined band of brigands. With these he methodically raided such parts of the Mogul Empire as he could conveniently reach. Strictly obeying Sivaji's orders, these soldiers spread terror and dismay wherever they went. Sivaji would not call them off until a full, legal settlement had been reached with the enemy by which the prostrate territory paid him a large annual tribute. Before he died he had made a considerable empire of his own.

During all this he behaved as an upright God-fearing Hindu. He observed all the practices of his religion. He spared women and children from raping, even when they were Moslems, and his personal life was, for the times, exemplary. The extraordinary thing was that his constant adviser was a Hindu holy man.

One incident mars the picture. He lured an opposing general into a trap by promising him a safe conduct. They met in a wood. The Moslem was surrounded



by Mahratta soldiers, though he did not know it. Believing himself safe, he embraced Sivaji. The Mahratta chief was wearing gloves fitted with long steel claws, an exotic item of the armour that the Mahrattas usually wore. While he embraced the other man, he tore him to pieces with his armoured hands.

His admirers say that the Moslem general had brought his horrible death upon himself by trying to stab Sivaji as he held him in his arms. This may be so, or may be not; we can leave the dispute to historians. What is interesting is that in India today stands a statue, paid for by Hindus, of a man who was so far from being non-violent that he could rip a living man to pieces with his own hands.

But perhaps even more telling is another monument that the fighting Hindus left behind them. In the centre of northern India, high on a rock, is the great fortress of Gwalior. The Mahrattas built it to protect one of the kingdoms they had carved out of the Mogul Empire, and had I all India to choose from, this is the place to which I would take the Western visitor to show him what the Hindus really are. A steep path winds up the rock underneath an immense wall. The wall is set with narrow towers, which slope inwards towards the top and splay out at the bottom so that they look like tall trees of stone. Six gateways bar the path at intervals until the road passes under the last arch of all. Then one is inside the vast internal courtyard: and here, instead of a keep or a tower of safety, are two Hindu temples, billowing with statues of the Pantheon of the Gods. It is quite appropriate. The gods of Hinduism are violent gods. They wave clubs in their many arms, dance upon dead enemies and make incessant war upon the demons who are the powers of evil.

That is why the Hindus admire the Mahrattas. Now, the Mahratta was a professional soldier. He worked at a dangerous trade, and like most men in a perilous affair, he went about it with a level head. Heroism was not his business. The professional soldier is paid to kill. When he sees he is defeated, he retires in good order. If, unfortunately, the enemy happens to be behind him as well as in front, he remains at his post, and dies there. This may make him a hero to civilians, but not to his fellow professional soldiers. They know better.

But in the Middle Ages and afterwards, India produced quite a different type of soldier. They were called Rajputs. They invented a thing called honour which it was necessary to preserve, or die. When they were defeated they did not run away. They stayed where they were and saved their honour by losing their lives. Honour, they thought, demanded that they never be defeated.

This was about as sensible as a surgeon deciding that he must never kill a patient. Any properly trained surgeon knows that he will inevitably kill several patients: he only hopes the number will not rise so high as to attract public attention. Warfare being even more of a hit-or-miss affair than surgery, good soldiers will inevitably lose some battles to better soldiers or even to worse ones. If the good professional soldier dies in this process, his defeat does not worry him: if the good soldier lives, it does not worry him either. The Rajput would have none of this. They evolved a code of conduct which exacted that every true Rajput should be fearless in battle, honourable in conduct, and unyielding in the face of the enemy. They were the chivalry of Hinduism. Like the knights of the Western world, they prized the honour of their womenfolk highly, even, as I shall now describe, above the womenfolk themselves.

Near the Rajput town of Udaipur is a vast ramble of towers and ruins set



on a mountain. This is the fortress of Chitor. It was the centre of some of the most preposterous episodes in the history of the world.

In the year 1303 this famous fort was besieged. As with the Mahrattas, the enemy was again the Moslems, led by the king of Delhi, Alla'udin. This Moslem had fallen in love with a beautiful Rajput princess called Padmini. He waged war on the Rajputs and captured her. Some Rajput knights recaptured her and took her to the fortress at Chitor which Alla'udin promptly attacked. So goes the story. It is not certain how much of it is true, but there is nothing improbable in the sequence of events. But what happened as a result of them is documented history, insane as it may appear.

The Rajputs defended the fort valiantly, as their code demanded. The death rate among them was very high. Each day a new man was chosen to be the Rana (or ruler) and each day he was killed by the besieging troops. Eleven men in all ruled for twenty-four hours each and each died fighting. It was now presumably the moment to surrender. Instead the Rajputs marched their women in procession to an underground chamber. The beautiful Padmini entered last. The men then set light to the chamber and everything in it, burning all their womenfolk alive. Their wives and daughters having been reduced to cinders, the men dressed themselves in bridal robes and sallied out of the fortress, when they fell under the swords and lances of the enemy. Honour was satisfied.

It was satisfied, that is, until the year 1535, when it had to be maintained with another barbecue. This time the attacker was Bahadur Shah, once more a Moslem, but apparently heart-whole. He attacked Chitor and the Rajputs defended it with great gallantry. A touch of variety was added to the monotony of siege warfare. The Rajput Queen Mother put on armour and dashed out of the fortress at the head of some Rajput troops. She was, of course, killed. Her action was very remarkable: dominating mothers often have the feeling that they can do things better than their sons, but few have carried it to the point of charging an army with a drawn sword.

In any case, her action did no good. The Rajputs were once more faced with defeat. Once more it was considered that the only thing left for gentlemen and Rajputs to do was to set light to their women. This time the horrifying number of thirteen thousand females suffered death by burning. The pyre being well and truly lit, the Rajputs put on their saffron wedding gowns and rushed out upon the waiting enemy, who had little difficulty, as usual, in slaughtering thirty-two thousand of them.

I regret to say that this monstrous ritual was repeated yet a third time. In 1567 the Moslems arrived before Chitor; the Rajputs fought, lost, roasted their wives and died gallantly in a sortie, all as before. I shall spare the reader the numbers of the dead, either cooked or raw.

The great days of the martial Rajputs are now emphatically over. But the memory of their gallantry, their soldierly pride and their devotion to honour is still very much alive in the minds of the Hindus, who greatly admire them. The sieges of Chitor that I have briefly described are retold at much greater length in numberless ballads, which are still sung in the countryside. As has been remarked before, what is too silly to be said can always be sung.



# Vivekananda

THE HINDUS, THEN, HAVE CLEARLY NEVER LACKED THE MARTIAL SPIRIT: on the contrary, they have at times had rather too much of it. How, then, has it come about that the Western world thinks of the Hindu as one who shuns violence? Partly, of course, because the Hindu cultivates the idea. But there is another and more curious reason.

It began in a sideshow of the World Columbian Exhibition at Chicago in 1893. One of the attractions was a Parliament of Religions at which representatives of the various faiths were invited to expound their beliefs. They were invited to rise, if possible, above the temptation to call one another names, and to find as many points of agreement as they could. There does not seem to have been any serious intention on the part of the organizers to work out a new faith that would blend the best of all the old ones. But to everyone's astonishment, that is exactly what did happen.

A young Indian addressed the gathering. He was fantastically attired in a red robe, an orange girdle and a large yellow turban, a costume which the audience took to be the normal dress of Hindus but which was in fact invented by a Maharajah who wished the boy well and had paid for his passage to the United States. The young man was called Vivekananda, a stage name, so to speak, for he was really called something far less sonorous. He had a beautiful face and an even more beautiful voice. He proceeded to expound a faith called *Vedanta*. Like his costume and his name, this faith was also invented.

The enthralled audience thought it was Hinduism, but it was, in fact, an attractive *mélange* of ideas taken from Christianity, Buddhism, the Quakers and other sources. It was strung out upon a series of Hindu texts, chosen largely from the *Vedas*. *Vedanta* is, in fact, a complex philosophy evolved to explain away some of the revolutionary notions of the *Upanishads*. It took centuries to form and few ordinary Indians would nowadays claim to have mastered it. But the 'Vedanta' that Vivekananda preached had the Chicago audience standing on its feet and cheering wildly. It was full of love, non-violence, sweetness, light and—a novelty. The novelty was Yoga. To be accurate, there were four Yogas, or Hindu religious disciplines. But few of Vivekananda's listeners bothered to be accurate. The Yoga that thrilled them was the cross-legged one in which one controlled one's breathing, left the body and found God. It was a smash hit among the mystically inclined, and it still is.

Vivekananda toured the United States. Money poured in to his mission to a degree which astonished the young preacher. He did not rise above these sudden riches. On the contrary, it is recorded that he flung himself on the floor where he rolled in agony, crying out that all this wealth was being given to him while India's millions starved. He did not, however, return the money (and indeed, it might have been difficult to do so). He took it and continued the good work. Before long, America was convinced that India and Hinduism had great spiritual gifts to bring to a materialistic Western world. Vivekananda was a celebrity.



It so happened that he was the first celebrity that India had produced since the Indian Mutiny. He returned to his native country in triumph. His faithful Maharajah was delighted. Vivekananda rode in procession to the palace, while cannon were fired and choirs sang choruses from Handel's oratorios.

But if Vivekananda had fooled the Americans, he had by no means fooled himself. His conduct after his return to India does him a good deal of credit. He had been impressed by America—its industries, its way of life, and its riches, and, being an Indian, he found no difficulty at all in admitting it. He bluntly told the Hindus to get off their backsides and to copy the Americans.

When his astonished Hindu followers said that this advice sounded strange coming from the preacher of the virtues of contemplation and the higher spirituality, he burst out at them, 'What do you know? You are ignorant, sentimental fools! What do you understand of religion? You are only good for praying with folded hands: "O Lord, how beautiful is your nose", and similar nonsense. Who cares *what* your Scriptures say? I will go to a hundred hells cheerfully if I can rouse my countrymen to stand on their own feet and be *men*. Do you mean to say', continued the apostle of Hinduism, 'that I am born to live and die one of those caste-ridden, superstitious, merciless, atheistical cowards that you only found among educated Hindus? I hate cowards!'<sup>\*</sup> He hated them so much that he scandalized his disciples by ordering them to listen to a brass band playing martial music.

He must have been a difficult man to work with. Having preached Yoga to the Americans he once turned on one of his followers who insisted on meditating and said, 'How can you think of meditating for hours? It is enough if you concentrate your mind for five minutes or even one minute. The rest of the time', he went on with true American drive, 'has to be spent in *work*. I want sappers and miners in the army of religion. So, boys, set yourselves to training your muscles. For ascetics, mortification is all right, but for *workers*, well-developed bodies, muscles of iron and nerves of steel! The older I grow the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness: this is my new Gospel. Do evil even but like a man. Be wicked if you must but on a great scale.'

They are extraordinary words. But, like Gandhi, he knew his countrymen. He knew the Hindus. He made another journey to the West, and to drive home his lesson to his fellow-Indians, on the boat off Corsica, this preacher of non-violence who liked manliness and martial music celebrated a special rite in honour of Napoleon Bonaparte, 'the Lord', as he admiringly called him, 'of war'. He died, worn out, at the age of 39, the most revered and most admired Indian of his day.

<sup>\*</sup>These surprising quotations are all from the official *Life of Vivekananda*, written for the Ramakrishna Mission by Romain Rolland.



# Why Indians Do Not Get Better All the Time

WHAT VIVEKANANDA WAS INTRODUCING to his astonished disciples was the Western idea of Progress. I do not have to say what this is: everybody knows. The whole idea was beautifully summed up when some people, tired of the North Vietnamese, said, 'We should bomb them back into the Stone Age.' It is all there—the triumphant March of Man from stone implements to the thermo-nuclear bomb.

Now Progress is such a shining thing that it is difficult for the Westerner to realize that until Vivekananda came back from the United States, the Indians had never heard of it. It may make it easier to grasp if we remember that among others who had never heard of it are Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Jesus Christ, Augustus and Virgil. Virgil indeed believed in Regress. Being a man who kept his eyes open, he felt that things could not always have been as bad as they were, and he wrote about a Golden Age long, long ago. Mohammed certainly heard of Progress and promptly put a stop to it by telling his followers that everything was the will of Allah, and to try to go one better was blasphemy. But between Virgil and Mohammed much had happened in the West. It is important to my argument to know what it was that had taken place.

If I say to you, 'I want to better myself,' you will immediately know what I mean. I wish to improve my social position, I want to make more money, I want a bigger car and a bigger house. You will be approving. If I say, 'I want to make a better *man* of myself,' you will be much more approving. You will understand that I have risen above material things, and want to make myself more kindly, more truthful, less angry, less greedy, and more helpful to my fellow-men. This, most people will say, is much better than wanting a bigger car. Yet strange to say, the first idea stems directly from the second.

The contemporary notion that things ought to get better all the time was quite unknown in the ancient world. The Egyptians were convinced that nothing got better until you were dead and gone to the Other World. The Greeks were immensely curious about *this* world but did not think for a moment of improving it. Plato wrote a book about an ideal republic, but that was specially designed to keep everything as it was—bright shining faces, and all in their places, and woe betide anybody who stepped out of line. It was a republic where philosophers could be comfortably undisturbed, Plato himself being a philosopher with a distinct taste for pushing the unphilosophical around. The Romans were once popularly supposed to be engineering geniuses who invented the arch and the dome, but we now know they merely borrowed the ideas from the Near East. Having learned to make roads from the Persians, they went on making them in exactly the same way for five hundred years. Emperors strove to build bigger than the other emperors, but that was because they were vain, not progressive. Some of them were mad, as well as vain, but the Romans never thought of changing their constitution. They merely slaughtered the intolerably bad emperors, and then put the job up for sale. Whoever bribed the army most, got it.



Some Romans made a lot of money, but our notion that a man *ought* to make a lot of money would have seemed to them unexpressibly vulgar. Besides, it was silly. The richer a man got, the more he stood in danger of being killed on a trumped-up charge—or no charge at all—so that the emperor could get at his money. It was a wholly static society, and when it moved to Constantinople, it stayed so static that the word ‘Byzantine’ has come to mean a rigid way of life with no possibility of change.

But change was in the air, for all that, and it was due to a sect of religious nuisances. These were the Christians. Their faith was difficult to define since they were always arguing about what they believed (and two millennia later, they are still at it) except for one thing. They believed they were better than other people. They prayed, they fasted, they gave alms and they were much concerned about the salvation of their souls after death. But in this they did no more than the devotees of the mystery religions, such as the cult of Isis. What marked them out was their conception of sin. Sin was a highly confusing conception. The Christians said the Romans were sinners because they were not Christians, but went on to proclaim at great length that the Christians were sinners, too: in fact—and even more confusingly—Christians who were not sinners were so rare that they were declared saints, a notion quite new to the Roman world.

Not everybody, of course, could be a saint—that would make nonsense of the whole idea—but everybody should try to be one. Most people would fail, but for those who tried hard enough, there was a consolation prize. They would go to Heaven when they died and live forever in glory.

Now this meant that life here below ought to consist in getting better all the time: anything else was backsliding. We are so soaked in this idea (in the Western world) that it is difficult to see how priggish this view once seemed to the Romans. True, some fashionable young men studied under Greek philosophers. But these taught reasonable doctrines, such as Epicureanism, which said that the aim of life was pleasure, or Stoicism, which said that the aim of a wise man was to steel himself against whatever might happen, because whatever happened was Nature, and if it wasn’t, what was? But few people took the philosophers seriously except, perhaps, Marcus Aurelius, who took everything seriously because he was quite incapable of taking things any other way. Besides, the philosophers were periodically chased out of Rome as a menace to law and order.

But self-improvement spread, as it is inclined to do, because it is very difficult to challenge moral superiority. The Romans tried lions, but lions were no answer. The Christians pointed out that a fellow-believer was even more morally superior inside a lion than outside. Respectable women took up the new endeavour, because the Roman world was full of beautiful whores and complaisant slave boys. When the emperor’s mother became a Christian, the battle was as good as won. Her son, Constantine, declared self-improvement to be an acceptable faith, and when his mother discovered the nails of the Cross, he showed his good intentions by having one of them made into a bit for his horse.

In the disasters of the barbarian invasions, self-improvement almost vanished, but it was revived with enormous effect by a saint. He was Benedict, a holy man and a born organizer, who believed that work was prayer. He founded monasteries to carry out his idea and laid down detailed rules as to how it was to be



done, even drawing up a rule for the birching of boys. Other orders were set up in imitation, and between them they saved civilization. Self-improvement had come to stay, and it is still with us. As the centuries rolled on, Rome, it is true, began to lean towards the Epicurean view of life, especially in the Vatican, but Martin Luther corrected that. The Protestants became the greatest self-improvers in history.

They not only improved themselves, they bettered everything within sight. They prospered mightily until God blessed them with the invention of the steam engine, with which they changed the face of the earth. The idea that one should get better all the time personally gave way to the notion of universal Progress, the idea which so struck Swami Vivekananda.

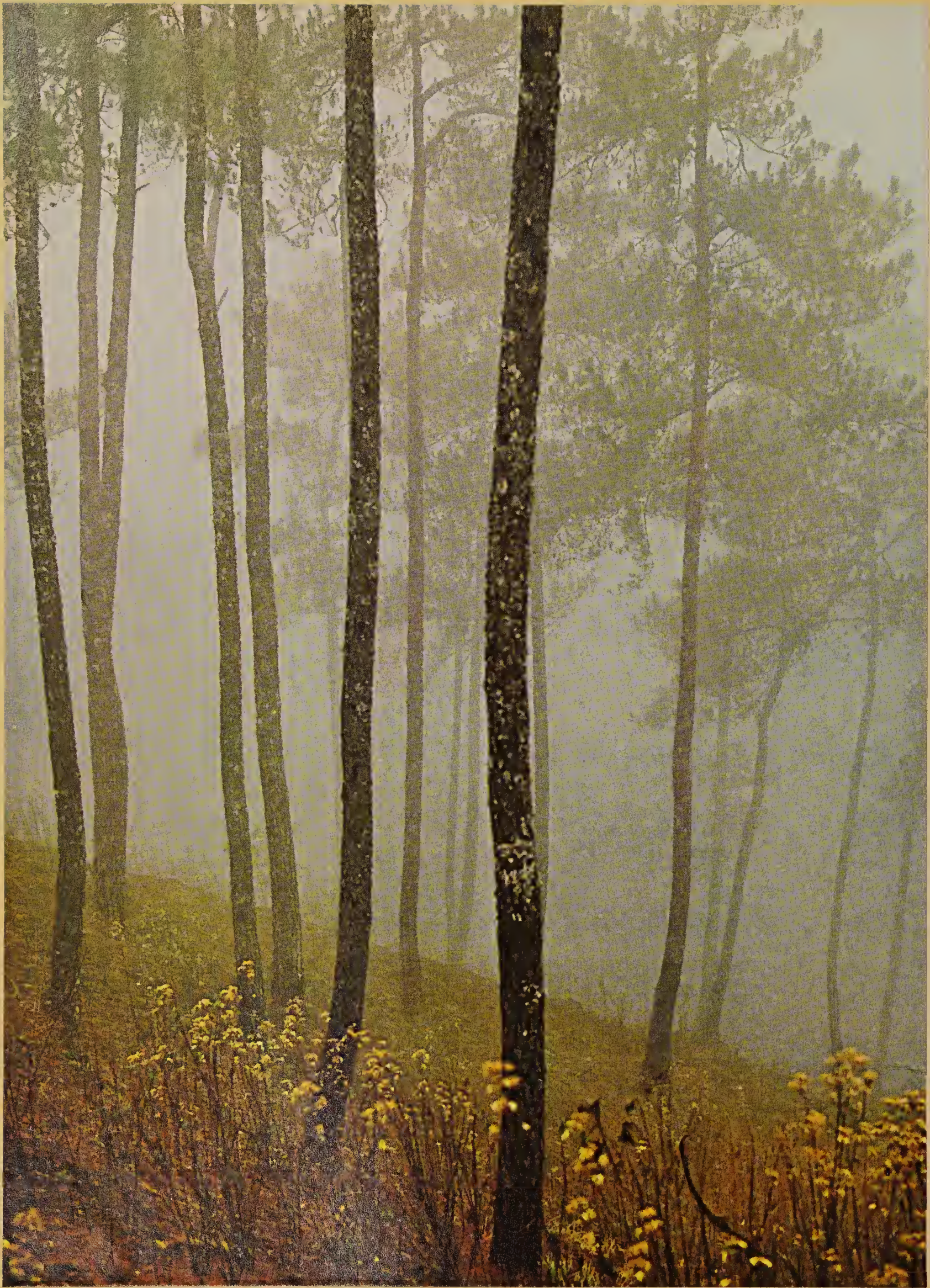
As he discovered, the Hindus had never heard of it. All that I have been describing went on without once touching the Hindu way of life. Now, just as the ideas of the early Christians still affect even the most agnostic Westerners, so the tranquil lives of the historical Hindus still affect the most earnest and strenuous Indian mind. When the British left India they left the largest under-developed country in the world. Since they had been ruling it for two centuries, this does not do them much credit. But it was not entirely their fault. Why, I shall show in the next section.



- 18 Mango trees on the road to Dharamasala. Mangoes are soft, delicate fruits, with a beguiling perfume. If the central pip, or stone, is broken, sometimes an extraordinarily ugly beetle crawls out













- 19 Morning mist on the road from Shillong to Gauhati, in Assam
- 20 Buddhist prayer flags in the remote state of Sikkim, in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains. Sikkim, once closed to visitors, is now being increasingly opened up
- 21 Kashmir again, near Gulmarg, among the mountains. The tree is a silver birch

Although the Tropic of Cancer runs right through the body of India, it is only in the deep south that the flora takes on that lush, overgrown appearance that is associated with 'tropical' lands. In the north the jungle takes the form of an open forest, while in the mountainous Himalayan region the scenery has an almost European aspect. Timber was so abundant when the Aryans came into India that for centuries they built in nothing but wood. The finer timbers, such as teak, are still exported to the rest of the world.

Wild flowers grow in such profusion that, until the Moslem invasion, there were no gardens in India. Even today they are a rarity. But flowers are used in great numbers for decoration, and especially for the familiar honorific garland, a rope of tightly-packed blossoms.

From the earliest times Indians have made a deep study of the medicinal properties of the seeds and fruits of trees, of herbs and of roots. Thus the ancient doctors used the oil of the chaulmugra tree as a cure for leprosy and it is still used in the treatment today.















22 Bamboo after a monsoon shower. On the road to Shillong, in Assam

23 Known popularly as spider lilies, these flowers were photographed in the Kaziranga game reserve in Assam. Tigers, rhinoceroses and elephants are in abundance. Fifty years ago India's big game was rapidly disappearing. The lion was extinct and the rhinoceros threatened to go the same way. The game reserves are helping to remedy this, but Indian wild life is still diminishing

24 Tropical jungle on the road to Ootacamund, a hill station. These are places to which people go to escape the hot weather. In the old days 'Simla', 'Ooty' and 'Darjeeling' were places round which much of the talk of British residents revolved. They went there to escape the heat in the cities such as Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.

But although these cities are busy and populous (in the case of Calcutta, frighteningly so) the real life of India lies in the villages. Seventy per cent. of the population live in them. They are mostly quite small, consisting of a collection of huts and a small shop or two, strung out along a road or gathered round a





central sandy piazza. This will invariably have a tree in its centre, sometimes a banyan. This is the gathering place for the male villagers in the cool of the evening.

Each village has its council of elders who conduct the affairs of the village, often with great wisdom and skill. Indians have a great admiration for these councils and they have a place in the Constitution. Life in the villages is monotonous, but it is far from grim. The average villager is much attached to his birthplace and to the feeling of belonging to a community of friends (with an enemy or two, for the sake of variety). He misses it sorely if he emigrates to the cities, and, like the Greek and the Italian, will some day return.

On the other hand, the illiteracy of the peasant, his almost total ignorance of the world outside, is one of the principal problems which the government has to solve. To persuade these villagers to do anything new is a heartbreaking task

25 Twilight in a village in Rajasthan



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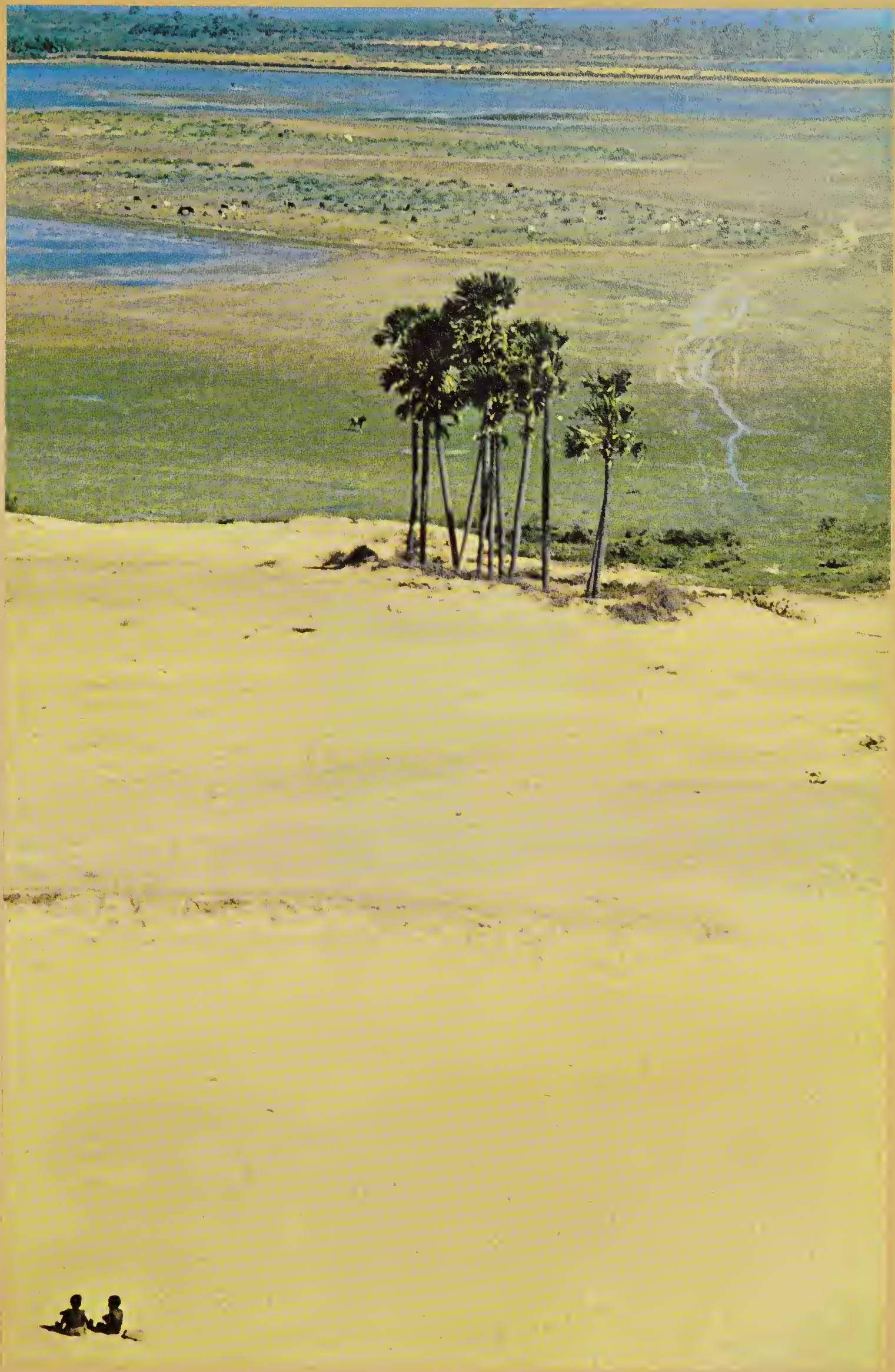




- 26 Mahratta country, between Poona and Bombay. The Mahrattas, a fighting race, had their strongholds in the surrounding hills
- 27 Rajasthan. A tiger in the wild game reserve at Sariska
- 28 Sacred monkeys in a temple to Hanuman. Hanuman was a monkey who assisted Rama in his search for Sita, his abducted wife, as told in *The Ramayana*. He is therefore worshipped as a god. The monkeys may not be killed, in or near the temple, but monkeys, as a breed, are not held sacred
- 29 Elephants being washed in preparation for a local festival in Kerala. They will be painted and adorned, and then led round to whip up funds for the festival. On the day itself, they will take part in a procession. Normally, they are working elephants, hauling timber
- 30 The waterways of Kashmir are one of India's principal tourist attractions. Here they are seen at the beginning of spring. Kashmir was a favourite resort even in the time of the Moguls. Jehangir laid out gardens there for his pleasure
- 31 The very end of India. It is the Pamban Peninsula, and reaches out to Ceylon













- 33 The fortified city of Jaisalmer, in the desert of Rajasthan, viewed from the tombs of the Rajput nobles. Jaisalmer was the capital of a branch of the Rajputs and was founded in 1156 (see Plate 78)





- 34 Beniul Pass into the Vale of Kashmir, the route used by some of the invading Moslems
- 35 Lake Barabani, seen through heavy rain. Artificially created by building a dam, it is among the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, in Assam









# TWO

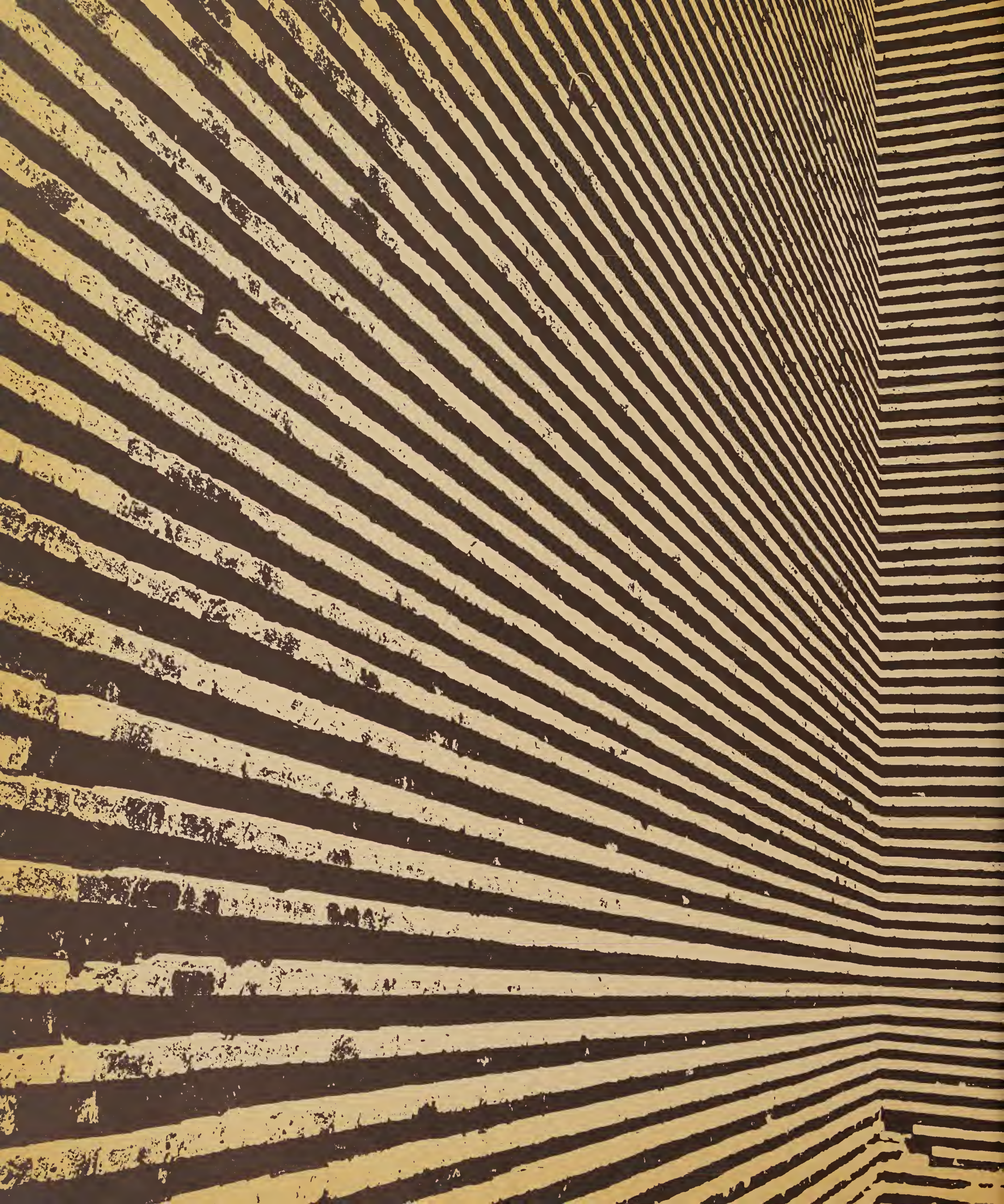
On the Coromandel coast, at Mahabalipuram. The Sea Temple, a structure 36  
dating from the eighth century, clearly showing the three main parts of a  
Hindu temple—the courtyard, the entrance hall to the shrine and the shrine itself  
with its tower



# Temples, Palaces and Fortresses









# *From the Cradle to the Grave and Back Again*

IT IS SAID THAT THE ORIGINAL ARYANS who conquered the northern part of India were a fine, upstanding, freedom-loving people, among whom Father was the head of the family and his word law. As for religion, they worshipped the gods of Nature in a manly fashion, with no nonsense about priests. Father did the daily sacrifice in the courtyard of his own simple house, and that was that. They were ruled by a king, but he was kept in order by a council of elders, just as he was among the barbarian nations at the time of the Roman Empire.

It is a noble picture, but then it always is. The Vikings are a dashing race: Caractacus is a hero: and the Germans still yearn for the days when they lived in forests and elected their rulers with wild yells and a clashing of shields. We all of us still read Homer.

But the truth of the matter is that we know so little about the beginnings of civilization that we are free to believe practically what we please. We all of us feel that what we really want to do is to get close to Nature (unless we *are* close to Nature, in which case we emigrate in millions to the cities), and the natural ways of these early folk appeal to us. If we could actually meet and talk to one we would probably decide he was a homicidal psychopath and lock up our daughters.

What we do know is that the Aryans came across a race of people whom they described by various rude words such as flat-nosed and black. It would seem that these people rendered themselves objectionable by being the original owners of territory that the Aryans wanted. The Aryans got it by force of arms and then proceeded to treat the black man as an under-privileged minority, thus being the first people to establish a social system which has persisted in some parts of the United States and all parts of the Republic of South Africa down to this day.

They then went on to organize themselves, and when the Aryans do, at length, emerge into the light of history, they have evolved what can only be described as a technocratic state.

In our own times we believe in mathematics. We believe mathematics can work wonders; we see mathematics doing it every day; and we believe that without mathematics, very few wonders can be done. But the vast majority of us find mathematics very difficult, so we leave them to our technicians (whom, if they are very educated, we call scientists). We know that some technicians get their sums wrong, but we do not know how, because it is all so difficult. So we leave it to other technicians to put it right. All this works very well, on the whole, for us. If we do have a problem, we hand it to the technicians, who work it out in mathematics and feed it to a computer (which we admire but cannot use). This supplies us with an answer in which we have great faith.

Now the scientific principle on which the Hindus worked was that everything happened because of the gods. They had several, in charge of the weather, the crops, mankind, birth, death and so on. The gods could either act from their own sweet will (which was rarely satisfactory) or they could be made to act in predetermined ways. This could be done by various formulas, very much like

A brick wall at Gaur forms a striking geometrical pattern under the strong Indian sun. Gaur, in West Bengal, is a dormant city of great antiquity, situated in a jungle of bamboo and wild mango trees. Its recorded history begins in AD 1200, but it is known to have been a metropolis far earlier



programming a computer. The only people who knew these formulas were the priests. These priests called themselves Brahmins, a word which had a certain savour of magic power about it. They performed sacrifices in the right way and said the right things while they were doing it. If they said the wrong things (or anybody else did), the computer would fuse and the plant blow up. In return for this service the Brahmins demanded only that they should be housed, fed, clothed and heavily tipped, all at the public's expense.

It was a very heavy burden, but the non-Brahmin Hindus put up with it for the same reason as we do—if *we* don't pay, the Russians will. The Hindus were continuously at war among themselves, and the Brahmins made no secret of the fact that they would defect to the enemy at the drop of a hat. They could bless you, they said, but with a subtle change of words they could turn it into a curse. Kings who wanted to win wars made sure that they had a well-paid advisory board of Brahmins on their side. All this is perfectly understandable to us today—the Brahmins had no more moral principles about their power than our own scientists.

The Brahmins, however, were stern moralists when it came to other people. They taught that anybody who led a bad life—who was cruel to his family and stingy with Brahmins, for instance—would be born again, when he died, but born as an animal, or even as a plant. From this he would have to work his way upwards through a series of rebirths until he came back to the status of a man.

If it seems bizarre to us that the cat can be our grandfather, it is really no stranger than the belief that grandfather can be condemned to roasting in hell-fire for all eternity, a notion which was firmly held by all Europeans during the most productive centuries of their civilization. Michelangelo even painted an enormous picture of it.

In Michelangelo's picture, of course, as well as the damned, there were the saved. These also played a part in the Brahmin picture. Here the idea was neat and simple. The Brahmins *were* saved. They were twice-born: that is to say, they had been born again, but as a man. They had been saved. Now Christians have never made up their minds whether a believer can be saved in this life or if he has to wait for the next or even how long he has to wait in the next life, the notion of the Last Judgment being very vague. The Brahmins were very precise. Brahmins did not need saving because they were born saved: nobody else could possibly be a Brahmin in this life—it was a strictly hereditary aristocracy—but he might, in his next life, be born one. The way to make sure of that was to behave in an exemplary fashion in this life, by far the best example being to give money and food and gifts to Brahmins, who in return, it will be remembered, would perform the no small feat of seeing that the Universe ran in a helpful way.

Now just as we obey the technicians in every act of our life, from the cradle to the grave, so the Brahmins were obeyed by the Hindus. We are born with a doctor in attendance; a Brahmin recited the right prayers. Educationists guide our youth; Brahmins were the teachers of prayers, morals, and the right way to treat Brahmins. Marriage with us is a free choice, but technicians in the form of psychiatrists will put the free choice right if it has been a bit too free; the Brahmins were there from the moment of choosing the bride. We are prosperous, or in a recession, according to what our financial technicians think we should be; the Brahmins guided the ruler, and they guided everybody else



in their financial affairs. A man would no more think of starting on some enterprise without a paid blessing from a Brahmin than an old Sicilian peasant woman would think of going to market without crossing herself. Only on the funeral pyre were you on your own. The Brahmins, with great restraint, had nothing to stop you being reborn a toad, if that is what you deserved.

I shall call this complex of beliefs Brahminism, and two things are immediately clear: Brahminism would not be followed with an overwhelming enthusiasm (except by Brahmins) and, secondly, sooner or later the brighter intelligences among the non-Brahmins would see through the whole thing and try to get rid of it.

The first point is quickly proved. When a people have a deep love for their religion they raise great monuments to it. It took genuine enthusiasm to drag huge stones across the countryside and build Stonehenge. The size of Solomon's Temple surprises everyone who has walked over the top of the hill in Jerusalem. The neolithic people who carved out the underground temple at Tarxien, in Malta, still make us marvel at the skill and care they lavished on it. The Christians built Ephesus and St Peter's. The early Brahminists built nothing at all.

There is no mention of temples in the *Rig-Veda* nor in much later texts. It has been supposed that such temples as there were must have been built of wood. But they must have been modest affairs, little more than huts. Even that is doubtful. Neolithic huts have left their traces (on the Palatine, for instance), for the poles had to be sunk into some sort of foundation, and the sockets can still be seen where they were sunk in rock. None have been discovered in India. We can see from the tombs of the earliest Egyptians that they had a passionate belief in life after death. The Indians built no sepulchres or cenotaphs. Perhaps it was thought inappropriate to raise a monument to somebody who might, after all, soon be snuffling around it in the shape of a pig.

As for those who saw through Brahminism, they came early on, and we have already seen what some of them thought and did—Gautama Buddha, for instance, and the philosophers of the *Upanishads*. There were others, such as the Jains, who rejected the whole idea of a technocratic priesthood. One sect of Jains went about completely naked, a striking hint to any Brahmin seeking a tip that the Jain was not going to put his hand in his pocket.

Since the Buddhists and the Jains had a fervent faith, they began to build and carve, and they raised the earliest monuments in India. Both sects dug out gigantic caves, in which, as the centuries passed, they put statues. The Buddhists, in particular, showed their reverence by building shrines for the relics of Gautama—a hair, or a tooth, or even some object that he had used. The shrine took the shape of a mound, first made of earth, like the tumuli that dot the whole face of Europe and Central Asia, and then, later, built of stone in the shape of a low but solid dome. The relic was placed at the top in a stone chamber, and an honorific umbrella raised over it, as though underneath there lay a king. The monks and the faithful would walk round this in procession, chanting hymns. From this grew the idea of an ambulatory, a circular corridor, open to the sky, but marked off by a railing, first of wood, then of stone. The tenets of Buddhism, remembered and passed on by word of mouth, were not rules about keeping Brahmins happy, but human stories about people and the things they did when they saw



the Buddha. It was a short step from telling these stories while seated round the shrines to carving them on the railing, exactly as the Byzantines put the stories of the Bible into mosaics on the walls of their churches. Thus the art and the architecture of India began.

But the Brahmins struck back. After some four centuries, they were once more in the ascendant. They persecuted the Buddhists, massacring whole monasteries, and eventually the religion was driven from the land. There are virtually no Buddhists in India today. The Jains were allowed to linger on. Their teachings were too abstruse to gain any great following. Besides, they were a pacific, gentle lot who did not really threaten the Brahmins.

From then on the Brahmins remained firmly on the necks of the people, like Old Men of the Sea, no more loved than Sinbad loved his burden, but grudgingly respected for their learning and their ability to keep the Universe running. They lost some of their power as adviser to princes when the Moslems conquered whole areas of India, but their hold on the people was even stronger, since they represented the Indian way of life in contrast to the hated invader.

They came back to full power when the British took over. As well as running the Universe, they ran the country, for it was the Brahmins who staffed the Civil Service. The British gave the orders, but it was only the Brahmins who knew whether they could be carried out. Outside the government offices, they held themselves aloof from the British, who were not merely born once, but were also conspicuously unbathed, personal cleanliness being one of the ways that the Brahmins, from the earliest times, had distinguished themselves from the common, sweating herd.

When I took Ram Lal up the steps and into the Viceregal Palace on that first independence day, it was Brahmins in the main that he saw, and that was why he said they looked so well-washed. Even the Prime Minister who had gravely saluted him was a Brahmin. But they were Brahmins who not only knew that their day was over, but also knew that it had lasted too long for India's good.

## *What the Hindus Really Do*

I SHALL NOW ATTEMPT TO DESCRIBE the religion over which these Brahmins presided. Most cultivated Westerners have at some time or other made an attempt to discover what the Hindus believe. What they find is unattractive, so many turn to India's philosophy, which is more to their liking. Unfortunately, Indian philosophy is not the Hindu religion, although a great number of people spend their lives thinking that it is.

I once took an Indian into St Peter's to hear pontifical High Mass. He was a born Hindu, but, like a great number of Hindus, by no means an enthusiastic believer. He watched the ceremony, listened to the Pope delivering a homily, and then we came out into St Peter's Square. 'Well,' I asked him, 'what do you think of it?'



‘What was all the fuss about?’ he asked, and made no further comment.

A principal part of the fuss was the Pope. Now Hindus have no Pope. They have no archbishops, or bishops, either. There is no Top Brahmin. They look upon one Brahmin as being as good—or as bad—as another. A further part of the fuss was the gorgeous vestments of the clergy. Hindus have no ecclesiastical finery. The priest dresses like anybody else, except that he wears a thread across his torso, like that assumed in the Jewish bar mitzvah ceremony. Lastly there was the Mass itself. Admittedly this was an exceptionally complicated one, but my companion could have made the same remark if I had taken him to a Protestant service. The Hindu has no ceremonial, and this is something that the Westerner finds most disappointing.

I remember an English film producer coming to India with the idea of making a motion picture set among Indians, and he was most eager to see *puja*, a word which he had learned meant the service held in the temple. He thought it would make a fine, spectacular scene. So I took him into a temple to see.

We stayed an hour, during which about eight Hindus came in, women and men. Each gave some money to a beggar at the door. They then crossed the temple courtyard and went to the central shrine which contained a large stone phallus. Some said a prayer and rang a bell above their heads, and then went away. Others gave money to a priest, who sat by the shrine, yawning and scratching himself. When the money was given, the priest rose, with great reluctance, and, muttering some prayers quite inaudibly, spread a little clarified butter on the phallus, muttered another prayer, and, grunting, sat down again.

That was all. The producer was dismayed. I heard afterwards that he told his friends I had deceived him in order to preserve the secrets of the faith. He left India convinced that somewhere else there were splendid and arcane rites with music, lights, incense, choirs, and acolytes.

There are not. He had seen *puja*, and that is all there is to it. The same thing happens when there is a religious festival, except that more people do it, but always singly, never in communion. On festival days a little more goes on outside the temple, but it is pretty, not solemn. The statue of a god may be taken out in a procession on a decorated chariot, or on an elephant. This is sometimes colourful, but it is regarded as a parade, not a ceremonial. At one festival, lighted lamps are put in special niches outside the shrine, but it has no more solemnity than hanging up the Christmas decorations. One festival is simply a wild burst of fun. People go about in old clothes, throwing coloured water or powders at one another, as one throws confetti at a carnival. There is nothing sacred about it. You try to get a few squirts on you because it brings good luck and, anyway, proves you are a good sport. But that done, you dodge the rest as boys dodge snowballs.

Most temples have a statue of a god or goddess, and sometimes of several deities. Most Westerners are careful to call these ‘statues’ and not idols, because they merely represent the invisible god or goddess. Indians themselves are not so picky. The statue is often (but not always) bathed and dressed each day, and in theory, it is done to gratify the deity who is watching from Heaven. But honest Hindus admit that among the mass of Hindus, it is the statue that they have in mind when they pray. It happens elsewhere. At Castel Mola, in Sicily, there



is a life-sized statue of St George on a white horse, much venerated by the villagers. The parish priest once said to me, 'When I first came here I was disgusted because I was certain my parishioners prayed to that effigy of St George, which is idolatry. Now I know I was wrong. They pray to the horse.'

So much for the externals of the Hindu religion. If we now ask what goes on in the worshipper's mind, we shall get a dusty answer. It is a saying among Catholics who come from very old Catholic families that 'there is no such thing as a Catholic convert'. They mean by this that to be a Catholic, you must be born to Catholics and be brought up in a Catholic atmosphere, and they are probably right. The Hindus say the same thing. But they go much further. In fact, there *are* Catholic converts and there are large establishments of missionaries to see that there are: and whether they lack the true Catholic spirit or not, they are received (with joy) in the Church. But you cannot become a Hindu: nobody can.

Suppose you find yourself greatly attracted to the Hindu faith, or (as happens more often) to Hindus, it is not the slightest use going to the temple saying Hindu prayers and wearing Hindu dress. You will never be accepted as a Hindu. On the contrary, you will be considered something of a nuisance. Western women who fall in love with Hindus and marry them very often begin by wearing a sari, partly because it is a pretty garment, and partly to show how much they want to be a good wife. The Hindu husband is always irritated. I know of one such couple in Rome. She wears a complete Hindu woman's get-up, red dot on her forehead and all. Her husband, a Hindu, introduces her to strangers saying, 'This is my wife. She is Jewish.'

It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that the Hindu religion is exclusive, but it is not. A Hindu can believe anything he chooses and still claim to be a Hindu. As we have seen, Vivekananda made up his own religion: others have declared themselves to be atheists, and, indeed, some of the most revered Hindu theologians (if that is the word for them) have declared that the gods do not exist. Even if they do, a Hindu is not compelled to worship only Hindu gods. Hindus have, from the days of the first missionaries, been interested in Jesus Christ. As many missionaries have noted, they are not interested in the weak Western way because he was a remarkable man. They revere him because he is the Son of God, a conception which Christians sometimes find difficult, but which to Hindus is very easy, because the innumerable gods of their own were always having sons. Further, as missionaries have gloomily noted, the fact that a Hindu lights a candle to the Madonna does not mean they have saved a soul. It merely means that he thinks lighting candles is a pretty ceremony and that the Madonna is the Mother of God. A great number of the deities in the Hindu pantheon have mothers, and even wives.

Many Hindus have no respect for their religion at all. For years I worked side by side with Hindus in India who regarded the priests as charlatans, holy men as scoundrels, and temples as financial rackets profiting from the superstition of the masses. Yet in an argument about Western ways they would say, without turning a hair, 'My point of view, speaking as a Hindu, is this . . .'

What did they mean? They meant that compared to a Western person, they have a wider, less blinkered view of what life is about. The West has bound itself by creeds, all stemming from Christianity. Even people who do not



consider themselves Christians teach their children a Christian morality and expect their schools to do the same. The West *knows* it has the secret of everything: it is sure that kindness, loving your neighbour, helping the weak, alleviating suffering and, in general, doing some service to one's fellow men, is the only good and true way of living, and that these things must be done from the heart, not the mind. The Western reader of these words has only to imagine himself (even if he is a Communist) teaching his child that these things are wrong, to see how just the description is.

Through the long millennia of his history the Hindu has never felt quite like this. The Buddhists came near to it in practice, but the Brahmins chased them from the country, and the Hindu has never shown a sign of wanting them back. I do not mean that the Hindu teaches his child to go out and knock down the first defenceless man he meets and rob him. He teaches him to be kind, generous, helpful, truthful and understanding, just like any other parent. But it is without passion. It has none of the driving sense of sin of the Christians and their epigoni. It lacks even that intellectual passion of the liberals who believe their view of life is the only one because it is so *reasonable*. The Hindu is not good because he loves goodness: he is good because it is the required thing. As for goodness being reasonable, he has never for one moment in thousands of years thought the world was a reasonable place.

What distinguished the Indian from most other peoples on earth was his profound pessimism about life. It would be an enjoyable business on the level of eating, drinking, sex and song. But fundamentally, it was not worth living and the man who could escape from it was lucky, or rather, very wise. It was not even worth being disappointed about—a suicide was a man too much attached to living to see it for its true worthlessness. Fortunately, there were ways of escaping. Deep down, as I have said earlier in this essay, the Hindu is a nihilist.

Now, before India became free, it was uncomfortably full of Indians who wished to apologize to Westerners for everything Indian. In the nineteenth century the West was bursting full of pride in itself, and pessimism was near to blasphemy. Indians therefore combed their beliefs to find joy and optimism, or they hid its blacker gloom.

All that has changed. During and after World War II, pessimism became a fashion in the thinking West. Men like Kierkegaard were read, and, if not understood, there were popularizers like Sartre to explain them. It became the mode to say that life had no discernible meaning. It did not matter what you chose to do: the only important thing was to choose. A good deal of ranting went on, until, bored with the clamour, the ordinary man turned away from the whole matter. But the West had passed through a phase of pessimism, and may well be in it still.

But for the Hindu there is no ranting and no hysteria. He believes that each action which shows that he is attached to living—a desire, a love, a greed, an ambition—binds him firmly to a wheel of existence. He will go on living other lives, maybe; or, if he dismisses this belief as Brahminical claptrap, he will certainly find no escape from this one.

Still, there is a way of living which is not binding. You can live without any great yearning: so far as yourself is concerned, it is easy not to be greedy or lubricious: so far as you must deal with your fellow men and women, you can



do your obvious duty by them without bursting into a sweat of compassion about it, or beating your breast if you let them down. If you are not too much attached to anything, there will come, when you are mature and wise, some few moments or hours, or even, if you go right away from mankind, whole days when you are attached to nothing at all: and that is a state of bliss.

This is what the Hindu means when he says that we in the West are too materialistic and that the Hindu is more spiritual. He does not mean that we always have our noses in the trough while he floats three feet above the ground in a halo. He means that we are too attached to our own bodies and other people's bodies—and, after all, we do spend most of our day thinking about nothing else. Even if we rise to higher things, it is with a great gush of emotion, and that, in itself, is a very bodily thing.

As for the Hindu's spirituality, that word is a pity. It is badly chosen. The Hindu is an intellectual, one for whom the intellect is superior to other things, and in particular, the heart.

## *How to Build a Hindu Temple*

WHEN THE BRAHMINS HAD DESTROYED the heresy of Buddhism and were back in the saddle, they turned their attention to giving the Hindu a religion which would be safe for him. The Hindu (as we have seen throughout this essay) was a problem child. He was capable of wild outbreaks of violence: he was also capable of tremendous sulks in which he withdrew from the world and all its concerns. But he was also capable of doing as he was told and being good.

Clearly, there were two sorts of religion which would not do at all. The first was a fighting creed with a god of battles and a religion of the sword, such as the Semitic peoples had developed and which culminated in Islam. It could all too easily lead to the destruction of the Brahmins themselves. They had already experienced trouble with martial rulers. They were the kings' counsellors, but some kings had grasped the fact that, although the Brahmin was twice-born, he was dead just once, like anybody else, and they had cut off their heads. Equally, a religion of ecstasy and intense religious experience would do the Brahmins no good. It would merely increase the Hindu's tendency to snap his fingers at the world and go off by himself. It would produce a world of monks and hermits, as Buddhism had very nearly done.

There remained a middle course, and that was to devise a religion of family togetherness, civic duty, good works, charity (especially to Brahmins) and improving tales to tell the children.

They did this, and that is the origin of the Hindu temple.

The Hindu temple is a house, and the owner of the house is the god. The whole plan is domestic, and although the houses got grander they never lost their domesticity. The god has his residence which, like any other Hindu house, is set in a courtyard. Every house has an entrance hall and so has the Indian temple. Besides the private quarters of the head of the house and his wives, there will also



be a place for receiving visitors, holding parties and so forth. The Indian temple has all these things—first the hallway and maybe some subsidiary entrance; next the courtyard surrounded by a good, stout wall; next a large room, richly decorated, for entertainment; and lastly the private quarters. The three main structures had, of course, roofs, and these, as in the residence of any well-heeled family, were made as imposing as possible. Gables had no place in a tropical climate: the Hindus either never invented the dome, or, if they knew how to make one, it did not take their fancy. Instead, they raised roofs by corbelling, a system by which one stone projects a little over the one beneath it, so that finally a hollow pyramid is achieved. On a platform on the top of this pyramid was often placed (as a final homely touch) a stone replica of the tube-like wooden roof which covered the actual homes of the well-to-do. Thus the outline of the Hindu temple was achieved, so exotic to Western eyes, but in fact much more mundane than the soaring extravagances of Gothic.

Sometimes the pyramids were left stark and bare, save for incised lines to take away the heaviness. But, on the whole, this was felt to lack cosiness, so they were decorated with statues. So are Chartres Cathedral and St Peter's Basilica. But there is this difference: the statues in Christian churches yearn upwards to heaven, or gesticulate towards the throne of God. Their faces are full of spiritual yearning, their bodies hidden under heavy drapes. They lead the eye and the heart of the believer onwards and upwards to the realm of celestial bliss, out of this mundane life here below. Add an organ and a choir at full blast and even the dullest person feels he could, if he tried, be a saint.

The Brahmins wanted none of this. They had no organs or choirs. Instead, in the reception hall they put on shows of dancing girls and boys, who portrayed the stories of the gods and mortals with costumes, make-up and lighting exactly as if they were in a theatre. The sculpture outside followed suit. They were portraits of everyday people, fleshly, happy, holding hands, giggling, embracing and, in some cases, achieving the acme of domestic joy—copulation.

These statues were painted to make them look more real. The statues on the Parthenon were painted, too, but in delicate shades. The statues on a Hindu temple were painted in the bold colours dear to all Indian men and women. In the course of the centuries these colours faded, and with the languor which overcame Hindus during the occupation of their country, they were not repainted. Besides, the lack of colour pleased those Western aesthetes who could manage to look at them without having their classical sensibilities too revolted. But with freedom and the vigour which it has brought with it, some of the temples have been repainted.

Domestic as all this was, it was still not down-to-earth enough for the Brahmins. The Hindu was encouraged to have other gods than those in the temple. He had (and, among the orthodox, still has) a household god in his own home. He can worship this himself, or, if he has the money, he can have a Brahmin to do it for him. He also has a third god, personal to himself, and he often carries a tiny image of it, or the deity's symbol, on his body.

The sermons which had grown so popular under the Buddhists were dropped. The Hindu learned all the religion that he needed from quiet talks in the home from Brahmins or the male members of his family. He learned that being good meant doing his duty: obeying his father and mother, the laws and



the king; holding Brahmins in reverence and giving them gifts and food; saying his prayers, which were not emotional pleas but extracts from the old texts, often in the form of easily remembered pieces of poetry. He was taught to know the status in society to which he was born and not try to leave it, since that would cause a lot of bother for everybody and was against the will of the gods.

As for the deities, he was told stories about them, sometimes making them bogeymen who sent delicious tremors down one's spine, or, when he was older, stories of how they quarrelled among themselves, or with their wives. There were still a great number of gods, but they were conveniently grouped together. They were really the embodiments of two principal gods, Siva and Vishnu, and every child was born a follower of one or the other. There was also Krishna, an embodiment of Vishnu, but with such marked characteristics of his own that he was held in personal affection. He was the same as the philosophizing charioteer of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, but brought down to a family level. He played as a baby and stole the cream: he played as a young man and kissed the girls. He loved music and dancing and performed on an instrument himself. Beside him in the family circle of gods was Ganesh, a god with the head of a friendly elephant who wished well to everybody and took pleasure in bringing good luck.

If the Western reader finds all this as stifling as Christmas, so did many Hindus. They set up a cult called Bhakti, in which the gods were worshipped with fervent love, a love which often went to excess. It had its followers, but they were too few to make any real impression on the vast mass of Hindus, wrapped and tucked in the warm blanket of the Hindu faith. It kept them so warm and snug that in the end they fell asleep. In the nineteenth century some vigorous intellects among the Indians set about shaking their fellow Hindus awake. Societies such as the Arya-Samaj and Brahmo-Samaj were founded and, although they faded, the remarkable men who ran them succeeded in loosening the hold of the Brahmins on the people so that now, except among some right-wing political parties, it no longer counts. In this essay, Vivekananda must stand for all those brave pioneers.

## *A Good Word at Last for the Brahmins*

BY WHAT WERE THE MIDDLE AGES IN THE WEST, the Brahmins had successfully bedded down the Hindus in the easy, practical faith I have described. All the same, something had happened: the heretics *had* preached their nihilistic doctrines; people *had* listened, including kings. Some of their doctrines had found their way into the Brahminical texts, and since these were now written down, they were difficult to get rid of.

Where the heretics had composed whole treatises, the matter was simple. The Brahmins simply destroyed them. In this way we have lost practically all of the original teachings of the out-and-out materialists. But the sceptical teachings of some of the heretics had been bound up—we do not know when or why—with the holy Brahminical texts themselves. Thus while one part of the *Vedas*



taught that sacrifices and care for the Brahmins were essential for salvation from the chain of rebirth, another part (the *Upanishads*) taught, here and there, that they were not.

Now the Brahmins could easily have rewritten the whole lot. This is what the Soviet Union has been doing for half a century to make history conform to the current political fashion. The Brahmins did not do this. It must be remembered that they genuinely believed that such sacred books as the *Vedas* were infallible. It seems that they came to believe that anything which their ancestors had made part of the *Vedas* must be infallible, too: infallible, but contradictory.

A Western reader might well feel that this is ridiculous, for how can a text be infallible if one part of it says one thing and another something different? In that case I would like him to ask himself how the animals went into Noah's Ark—by twos or by sevens?\*

The Brahmins left the texts as they were but asked the best brains among them to think out a way to explain the contradictions. It is probable that all they had in mind was to produce a series of learned apologetics. But the minds that took up the task were very fine indeed. They produced no less than six systems of philosophical thought, of which the greatest is called the *Vedanta*.

This is not the holy stew that Vivekananda ladled out in America. It is an elaborate piece of speculation that only a trained philosopher can follow. It speaks of the ultimate things, the Creator among them, who takes on various forms, some of them resembling the more abstract conceptions of the nature of the God of the Christians. It is therefore thought by a number of people to be a religious book, and that a Hindu is a person who 'believes' in *Vedanta*. But Descartes, Spinoza, Kant and a dozen other Western philosophers all spoke of ultimate things and very often of God. Yet one can be a sincere and practising Christian without having opened one of their books or without knowing even their names.

When the second Vatican Council met in Rome, the bishops complained all over the city that the theologians were running the show. The bishops, immensely busy men, had forgotten what little theology they had learned in the seminaries, and had never felt the lack till now, when everybody was arguing about the true faith, and only the theologians really knew what it was. In the event, the theologians fell out among themselves, so that the buck was passed back to the bishops, some of whom promptly fell out with the Pope.

It was inevitable. Theologians are trained philosophers, and when philosophers get a finger in the pie, confusion results. The Brahmins saw this and they dealt with it. They taught Hindus that a man's life should be divided into parts. When he was young he should learn about his duties. When he was grown up, he should do them: that is to say, he should marry, raise a family, guide it the way it should go, take care of his worldly goods, distributing a part of them to the needy should they come to him (and the Brahmins, who were always needy, are always there). This should continue until, as they said, 'he could see the top of his grandson's head'. Then, and only then, could he turn his mind to more speculative things.

When that time arrived, he could do one of two things. Either he could take his well-earned ease in the bosom of his family, contemplating the good works of his life and hoping they would excuse him from being born again. Or he could decide that he wanted to know about the truth of things.

\*By twos *and* by sevens. The Pentateuch contains two conflicting versions of 'Genesis'.



This, he was told, would be a most praiseworthy thing to do, but he must not do it at home. He must first give away his possessions to his family (with a donation to the priests). He was then to take a staff, a begging bowl, and, wearing a simple robe, go off to the hills or the jungle, living on the charity of those he met on the way. Once in the hills, up in the forests, he could build himself a hut, and, living the life of a holy hermit, he could think as much as he pleased.

A large number of men did this and, even today, there is a lingering feeling in all old Hindu men that it is something they would like to do. It is impossible not to admire the Brahmins for encouraging it. On the one hand, they had tamed the Hindu into domesticity and the orthodox life. On the other hand, they had promised him an outlet for that nihilistic contempt for the world, the flesh and religion which, as we have seen, lies deep in the heart of the Hindu.

When I took my very first lesson in philosophy from my very first professor, who was John MacMurray, he began his lecture by reading his young audience an extract which very sternly laid it down that nobody should be allowed to study philosophy until he had reached a thoroughly mature age. It might have been said by a Brahmin; in fact it was said by Karl Marx.

Part of the wheel of a Sun chariot for a god.  
From the Black Pagoda, Konorak







The Kandariya Mahadeo temple at Khajuraho. Here the entrance halls have been duplicated to form a superb climatic composition. While the Hindus took many architectural forms from the Persians, the conical tower, covered with sculpture, would seem to have been a purely Indian invention 37

The same temple, close-to. The great profusion of sculpture serves the same purpose as the swarming ceilings of Baroque churches—to remind the worshipper of the vast population of demons and gods, on earth and in the skies 38

Khajuraho. Some of the temples are covered with sculptures portraying the sexual act with a frankness still not permitted in the Western world. The reason is explained on pp. 125ff. 39, 40

Khajuraho. A view of the western group of temples at dawn. They are reflected in the Sibsagar Lake, by which, to the right, is the maharajah's palace 41













39



40









42 Khajuraho. The temple of Chaturbujha, one of the best among the thirty temples which were mostly built between AD 950 and 1050. The essence of the teaching of the Brahmin priests was that a man's principal duties lay here on earth and they did not encourage transcendental speculation among their followers. Their architects followed suit. Their buildings are all firmly fixed on the earth, sometimes appearing to grow out of it by stages. Often, as here, they fit perfectly into the natural landscape.

There are differences in building style, and there was a certain evolution in the design as the centuries wore on. But there is nothing in Hindu architecture to parallel the restless change from Romanesque to Gothic to the Baroque and the Rococo that is found in Christian churches. There was, in fact, no need for it. Once the main lines of the Hindu faith were developed, there was almost no change, until recent times. Heretical groups continued to be formed, but did not remain heretical for long—their beliefs were sanctioned and they went their way in peace, still Hindus. The Hindu faith is the most ecumenical in history.

Thus the temples (which were built for the majority) remained much the same down the ages

(Overleaf) Reliefs on a sculptured wall  
at Hampi, Vijayanagar (see plate 73)











From the temple at Somnathpur. Built during the Hoysala period (10th– 43  
14th centuries) when Indian taste took a turn towards the elaboration of detail

Details from the Black Pagoda, Konorak 44, 45

Decorative panels, a constant feature in Hindu art. From Somnathpur 46

Rich and over-rich decoration in the Hoysala style, from Halebid 47

An unromantic, superbly carved elephant, in the clumsy act of kneeling. 48  
Belur temple

In contrast, vignettes as delicate as lace: also from Belur 49

The god Surya in the Black Pagoda, Konorak. The phallic waistband was a 50  
favourite motif with artists, though plainly would have been ridiculous if  
actually worn

A door guardian at the Hoyalesvara temple at Halebid: detail of costume 51

More details of the elaborately carved Hoysala temple at Halebid 52, 53, 54

The Bull Nandi, mount (and symbol) of Siva. From Halebid 55









44, 45



46, 47



48, 49



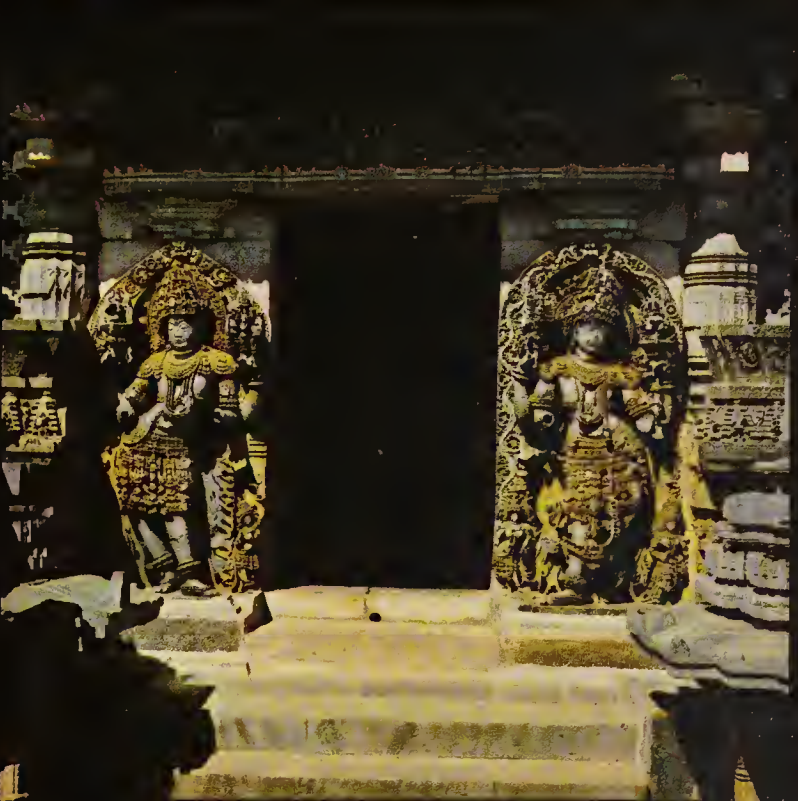
50, 51



52, 53



54, 55









56 One of the most remarkable sights in India, this is the porch of the great temple of Raghunathaswami at Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli (once known as Trichinopoly). The statues are at the entrance to the Hall of a Thousand Pillars (actually 940) and are ridden by men with hunting spears. They are 18 ft. high and are each carved from a single block of granite. They date from the seventeenth century



Entrance and façade to one of the caves at Ajanta. Ajanta ranks with Angkor Wat, Luxor, the Parthenon, the Colosseum and Santa Sophia as one of the principal monuments of civilization, and like those, it never disappoints. Carved into the living rock at various dates, beginning at about 200 BC, the caves contain stupendous sculpture and delicate (but rapidly disappearing) paintings. This is cave No. 26 in the amphitheatre of the Indhyari hills, which contains the complex. They were made, and inhabited, by Buddhists 57

Karli. The lion pillar which stands at the entrance of another Buddhist cave, the largest in India (see plate 64) 58

The example of the Buddhists at Ajanta was followed by Hindus at nearby Ellora, who carved the Kailasa temple out of the rock. It was created about AD 725–55 and entailed moving 200,000 tons of volcanic rock. (Moving stone to the site would have entailed more labour, but less foresight among the craftsmen.) The temple is dedicated to Siva. Like the Pyramids, it awes less by its beauty than its daring conception. Next to the Taj Mahal, it is the most visited place in India 59

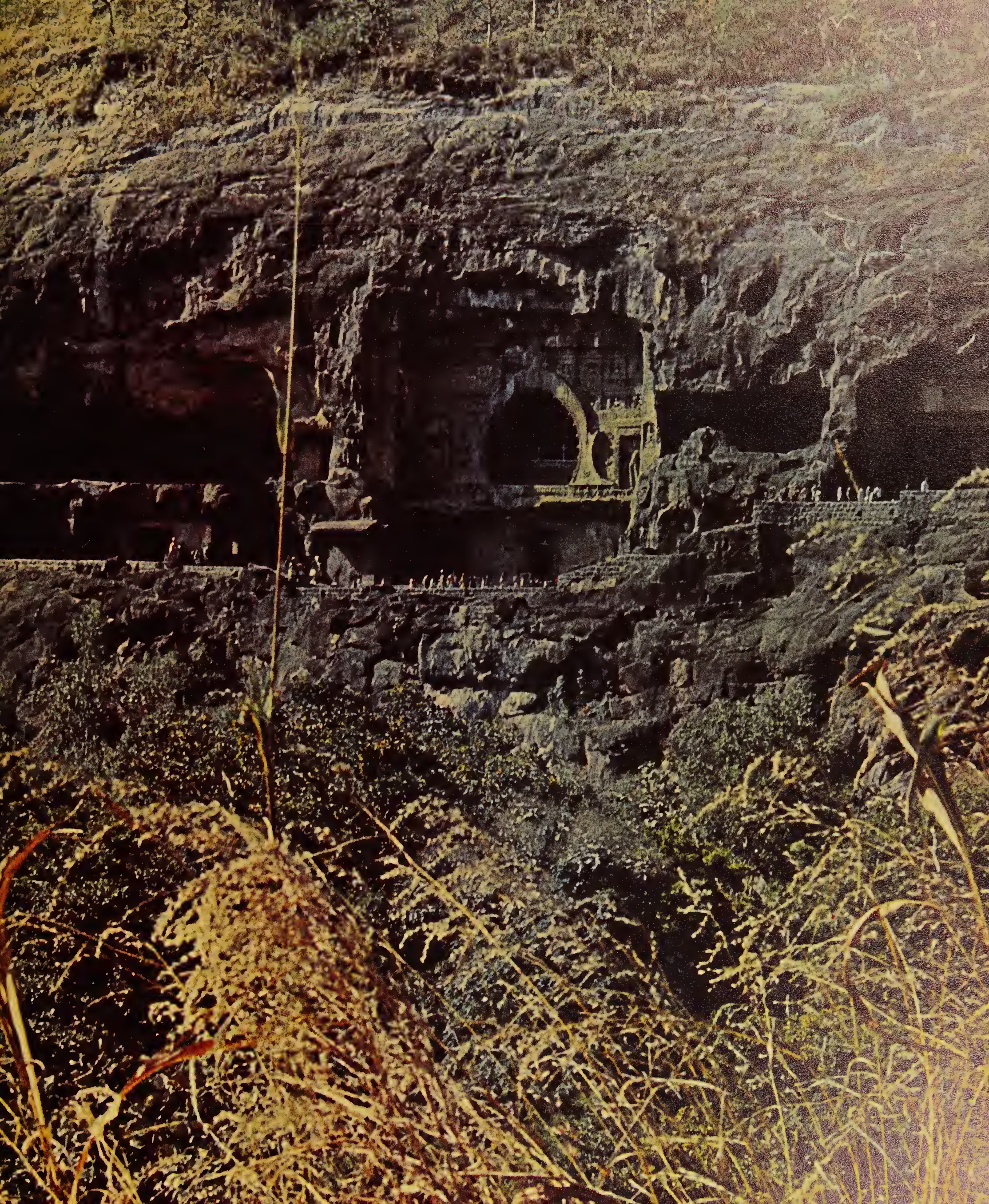
Ellora. The Jains also carved caves, and this is a relief of Mahvira, the founder of the Jain creed, in cave 36 60

Huge reclining image of the dead Buddha, who is in the act of entering Nirvana, in cave 26 at Ajanta. The notion of absolute tranquillity has never been so well realized, with such economy of means, in sculpture 61

A Jain saint, in cave 33 in Ellora. The vast gap between the skill of the sculptor of plate 61 and this is evident 62

Inside one of the caves (No. 19) at Ajanta. The whole chapel measures 46 by 24 by 24 ft. Behind the central shrine there is an ambulatory for processions 63









58



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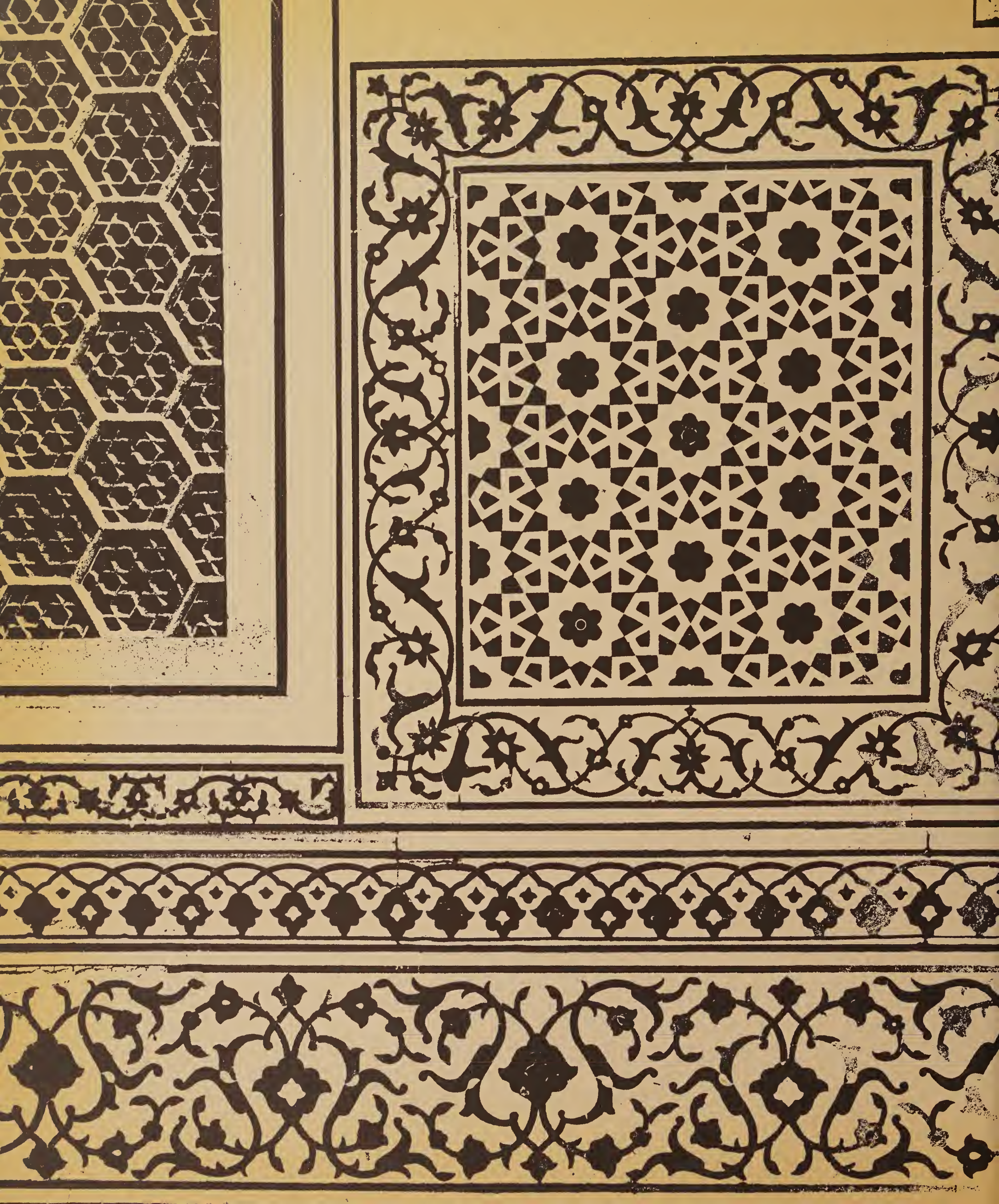


64 The great cave at Karli. The hall is 124 ft. long and 45 ft. high. The bold roof is supported by thirty columns. Probably carved out in the first century BC, it was first used by Buddhists and then by worshippers of Siva. The umbrella is of wood, and is original

(Overleaf) Marble inlay work from Agra: the façade of the tomb of I'timad-ud-daula, father of Nur Jehan and grandfather of Mumtaz Mahal, who lies in the Taj

Ivory and teak inlaid doors from the eighteenth-century mausoleum of Tipu Sultan, near Mysore City











We pass from purely Buddhist and Hindu art to the more eclectic Rajput style, which was strongly influenced by Moslem and Persian models. A striking inlay of mirror work from the City Palace at Udaipur, 1711-34 65

Udaipur, seen through the coloured glass windows of the same City Palace, a striking structure, 100 ft. high, with eight octagonal towers, ending in cupolas. Udaipur was the seat of the highest-ranking Rajput prince, the Rajputs being a fighting clan of Hindus. He claimed to be descended from the sun. It is a picturesque town, famous for its lake with islands on which are built palaces, designed in a delicate and romantic style, perfectly adapted to the setting 66

Udaipur: the City Palace. On the top floor, marble arcades surround a sunken fountain 67

Udaipur: a detail of the mirror mosaics which decorate the Maharane's apartment in the Jag Navas Palace 68

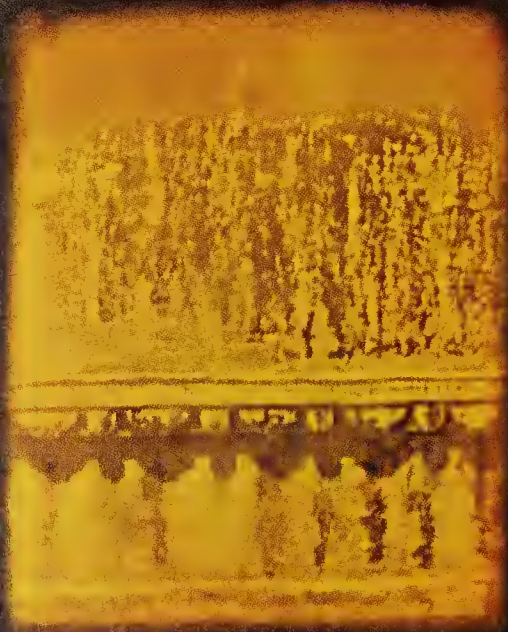
Silhouette of the palace on Jagmandar Island in the Pichola Lake, Udaipur. Shah Jehan, who built the Taj Mahal, was exiled here as a young man, when he revolted against his father, the Mogul Jehangir 69

Udaipur. The Pichola Lake seen from the City Palace, looking down at the Maharajah's summer palace, decorated with coloured crystal finials 70













67



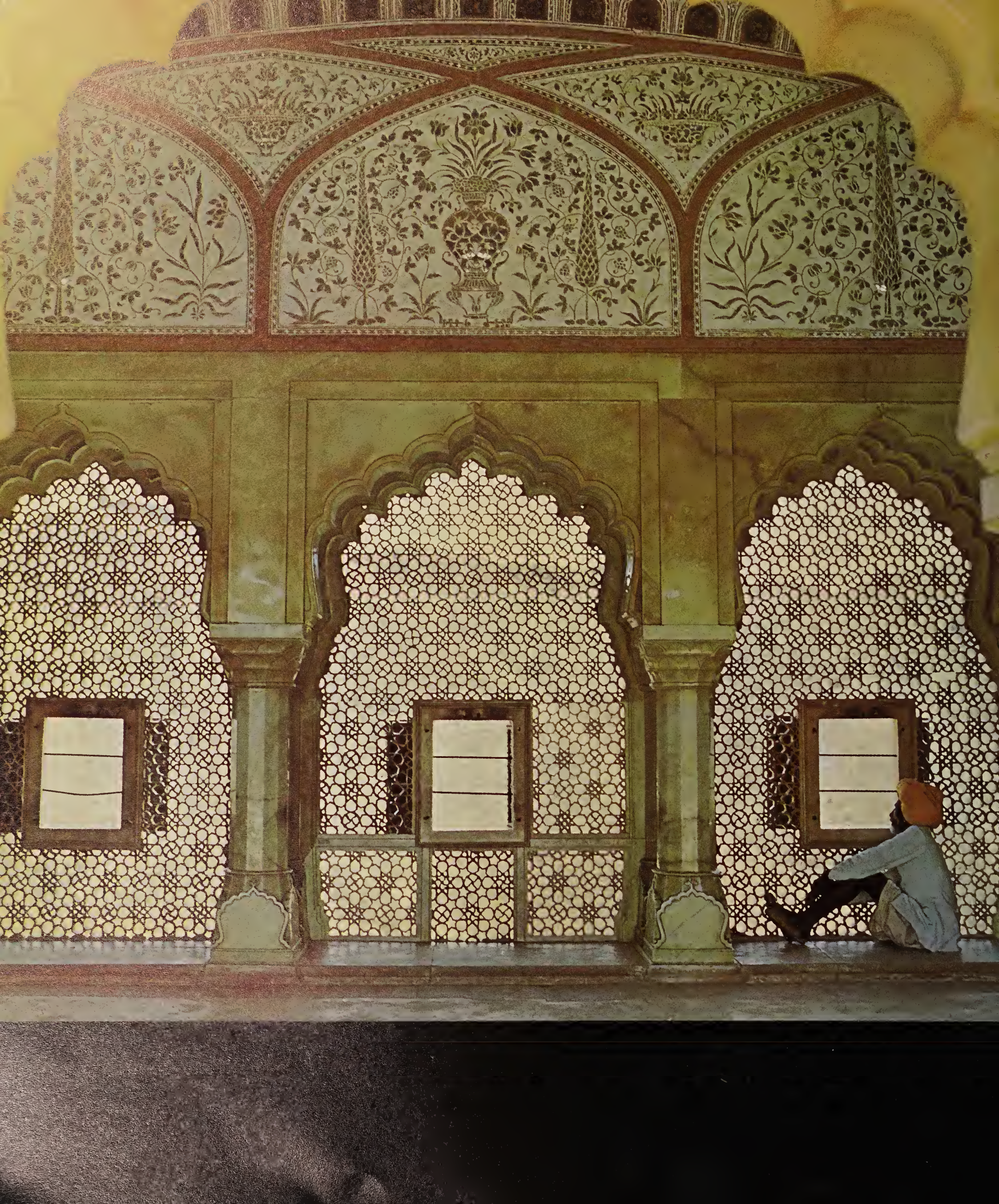
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69

















# Was Osbert Sitwell Rude or Right?

IN A BOOK called *Escape With Me*, Sir Osbert Sitwell said, 'The idea of India, despite its manifold marvels, continued to be repellent.' Repellent, that is, to Sitwell's cultivated aesthetic taste, because, as he says, of 'that repulsive, greasy quality that so often mars Hindu works of art.'

He wrote that in 1941, and Sitwell, in common with most English intellectuals of the time, did not know as much about Indians as we have covered, so far, in this brief essay. But that is too facile a manner of explaining the remark away. English aesthetes of Sir Osbert's stamp also knew precious little about Italian Catholicism, and they certainly found the cult of the Madonna distasteful. But their judgments about Italian Catholic art were shrewd, and their enthusiasms genuine. The Sitwells, in particular, educated the Anglo-Saxon world in the matter of the Baroque, which, until they came upon the scene, was generally considered flamboyant and ridiculous. Yet Sitwell finds India 'repellent' and its art often 'greasy'.

Of course, it might have been just a part of that studied rudeness with which the English of Sitwell's generation thought fit to treat all the members of their Empire except themselves. They were rude about the Australians, the Canadians, the New Zealanders, who were frankly called boors to their faces: these were all white people, so it would be natural that the un-white Indians should come in for their share.

But Sitwell was not a rude man, except when lambasting the English themselves. *They*, he said voluminously, were the real boors. So it is worth while looking rather deeper to find out why he said what he did. Besides, I fancy there are a good many Western observers who privately feel there is some truth in his remarks.

Indian art was wholly at the service of religion, right down to the first occupation of India by the Moslems. Let us contrast that with Western taste. Ours (for it is mine, too) is rooted in the Greeks. We cannot escape from it, even today. This is abundantly plain if you wander among the vast Billy Rose collection of contemporary sculpture in Israel, which I imagine must be the biggest in the world. The pieces are gigantic and are set out under the open sky like rocks in a desert. At first it seems a riot of wild forms, each more undisciplined than the next. Yet the longer one stays in the middle of it all, the more one sees that the most extravagant contortions of bronze and stone still strive for proportion: they still lean on a massive rhythm; they are still caged in logic, struggle as they might against it. It is only a seeming struggle. There is method in the madness, and, moreover, a love of method.

If you go from this, as I once did, straight to the museum at Athens and look at the stupendous Kouros figures, all becomes clear. These are among the earliest Greek statues that have come down to us. They are figures of Apollo, but are, in fact, magnificent renderings of young men. But they were carved before the rules

The ceiling decoration from a cave at Ajanta. The painters of Ajanta were remarkable observers of plants and animals, which they rendered with great verve



were laid down. They show the same thing as Billy Rose's collection shows—a wild force bursting out from inside the stone, but tamed, at last, by order and by rhythm.

I have said they are young men: but they are not entirely *real* young men. They have been idealized. They do not walk on the earth, however firmly they stand on their feet.

And this is what we always look for. Whether it is a man, a face, a landscape or a heap of broken machinery, it should be carved, painted or arranged in such a way as to add a transcendental quality to it, to raise it, if only a fraction, above reality. It is just that touch which saves a picture which set out to be kitsch, like *The Blue Boy*, from actually being it, though the poor lad escapes it only by the skin of his teeth.

I have spent endless hours in galleries looking for one clear indication that this requirement of Western art has been dropped by the artist. Sometimes I think I have found it, but I am never sure, not even with the most homely of the Dutch painters. It seems that, without it, we do not consider a thing a work of art at all, but an artefact. When I was a boy I read a book which said that when Duccio had finished his *Madonna in Majesty*, the Sieneſe took it out in procession because for the first time a painter had succeeded in painting a real woman, and not an icon. When I became a man I went to look at it, with attention. The man who wrote the book was a dolt. The Sieneſe rejoiced because she was the Queen of Heaven and there was no female in Siena who could ever look like her. I found it fascinating to study the picture inch by inch. It had been much restored. Some of the faces of the attendant choir of angels have been almost entirely repainted. The restorers had real human faces in mind, being government employees, and not Duccios. The result is sad, and a lesson in what we in the West demand before we will call anything a work of art.

We have seen that this elevation of the spirit into a transcendental realm was the very thing that orthodox Hinduism did not want. It was a terrestrial creed, assisting its believers to live a good, quiet, social, family life here on earth. There was a place for higher strivings, but that was the forest and the hermit's hut. You could not expect a man to spend the best years of his life as a decent, sober citizen and a good father, and then set him in front of a statue that took his mind off the whole business. Every Western architect who has been to India has noticed how firmly the temples are rooted in the earth; they even seem to grow out of it (Plates 42, 73). Sculpture had to be the same. The Buddhists could carve faces that seemed to be contemplating the sublime: so could the Jains. But Buddhists and Jains were heretics, and when the Brahmins got back to power, a good number of their transcendental statues got their heads knocked off.

I can best show this attitude by taking an extreme example of it.



## Sex and the Devout Man

AT KHAJURAHO, IN NORTHERN INDIA, there is a famous group of temples. There are twenty-two in all, and some icy aesthete must once have studied them as pieces of architecture, for they are described in all the guide books as masterpieces of the Nagara school. They may be. I would not know. Like the majority of visitors, I studied them as a permanent exhibition of dirty pictures, all the more permanent because the pictures are carved in stone.

Some of the temples are covered on the outside with thousands of human figures carved in high relief. All refer in some way to sex, but some are explicit. They show men and women copulating. When the independence of India was imminent, a number of politicians considered that, for the sake of the good name of the new republic, these statues should be covered with concrete. I remember a minister consulting me about it. But governments, little as we governed may think so, can be broad-minded and permissive, and nothing induces this desirable state of mind so much as an acute shortage of foreign exchange. India suffers from this. Concrete has been used at Khajuraho, but to construct parking spaces, restaurants and other amenities dear to even the most enthralled travellers.

The statues are higgledy-piggledy, but they may be sorted out into some order. They first show women getting themselves ready for the sexual act. They adorn themselves, they make up their faces. They are bare-breasted, or, if they modestly turn away to the wall, it is only to reveal that they are bare-bottomed. They were carved some time around AD 1000, and one's first impression is one of innocence. The nudity is not being used to sell hamburgers or pink champagne, as it might be today. At first glance it would seem to have served no commercial purpose or aim. But, as I shall show, it did.

Once prepared, the women approach their male lovers. These men are extremely interesting, for they are the original hippies. They are attired in a great many necklaces, and they wear nothing more impeding. Nude in all essentials, they approach their loves. The sculptures display a sound knowledge of the average male. The men show no physical signs of enthusiasm for the coming encounter. Limp from head to foot they submit themselves to the women, who arouse them in various well-known ways.

The act of copulation is next portrayed. The women make love in an extraordinary variety of acrobatic poses. The men receive this exhibition of sexual *allez-oop* with smiling calm, as if saying that what they had really come to see was the performing bears. Surrounding these scenes of passion and contortion are tasteful borders of carved vegetation from which emerge, here and there, enormous phalluses, which are enthusiastically embraced by yet more women. To relieve the tension, the sculptors, with a masterly touch, have scattered through the composition a number of figures who stand about doing absolutely nothing at all, except perhaps to scratch themselves.

Now to have this irremovable lump of pornography in their country is a considerable embarrassment to all right-thinking Indians. It gives the impression,



especially to a foreigner, that Indians are in the grip of lewd and animal passions where a woman is concerned. In fact, the average Indian's attitude towards sex is mild to the point of being sissy. India is a very respectable country. Wives are expected to be faithful to their husbands; husbands are expected to behave with the decorum suitable to the head of the usually large family. Contrary to what is believed in the West, the *Kama Sutra* is not on every bedside table. Sex is chaste and meant to produce children. If a husband demanded the contortions of Khajuraho from his spouse, she would go home to mother. So prim are Indian morals that the young never so much as cuddle in public, and it is forbidden to show kissing in films.

There is an official explanation of Khajuraho. The temples were used for the Siva-Shakti religion, one of the many branches of Hinduism. The devotees of this cult worshipped Siva as the Supreme God. They believed they could attain union with Him by sexual intercourse with women. Like most official explanations, it begs the question. How could a race like the Indians, well-known for the refinement of their philosophy, come up with a cult like this? Apart from being improper, it is not even sensible. To aspire after the Highest is certainly noble: while to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh is, after all, human and forgivable. But to insist that you are praising the Lord while you are having sex is to make the worst of both worlds. It is neither holy nor hearty. Or so say those Hindus (and they are in the great majority) who deplore the belief.

Most intelligent Indians do, in fact, know what caused the trouble. It was, of course, the Brahmins. As we have seen, the Brahmins made rules for everything, and the rules prescribed that the Brahmins should always be paid when they were being observed. The Brahmins thus made money out of all the major acts of a Hindu's life: the daily sacrifice (without which disaster would come upon the household), births, feasts, deaths, marriages, journeys away from home, building a new house, buying, selling and, of course, praying. But there was one thing that escaped their clutches, and that was sex. Once a man had paid to get married, he could go to bed with his wife gratis. Worse still, from the point of view of the Brahmins, if he went to bed with a woman not his wife he did not even have to pay a marriage fee. It is worth noticing, in passing, that in our civilization, lawyers have solved this problem. They have learned how to make fortunes out of other people's sex lives, especially when it goes wrong. But at the time I am writing about, divorce had not been invented.

The Brahmins' solution was more simple. They took over prostitution and made a business out of it, as cynically and as efficiently as *Cosa Nostra*. They attached prostitution to their temples and told true believers that to have sex with one of their girls (who were called *devadassis*) was a holy act, provided, of course, due payment was made to the madame, who was a male priest.

Not all temples had their prostitutes—not all men enjoy sex outside the house. Certain temples were dedicated to the cult, most were kept free from it. But where it was done, it was done in style. There was no squalid back-room, as one might imagine, nor was the act or worship performed publicly in front of the altar, as it was among the Canaanites of the Bible, who had thought up the same scheme (few, if any, religious ideas are wholly new). The girls had their own apartments, where they held musical soirées for their clients. They were taught to dance and sing and entertain, like *geishas*. They were often very talented,



and right down to the immediate present a gifted dancer or singer was suspected by all good Indians of being a whore.

But, in addition, the Brahmins had a profound knowledge of the nature of the human male. They did not subscribe to our Western myth that he is continually on the rampage for a woman (and neither, of course, do realistic Western women). Men have always been torn between sex and their hobbies, the favourite hobby of all being to lie on one's back doing absolutely nothing. The prostitutes were therefore taught all the arts of rousing men's sexual passions. Nowadays the thrillingly expert prostitute is more of a schoolboy's dream than reality, a dream which is shattered when he meets his first one. But in those times it was different.

The Brahmin has always had a great gift for studying a thing in its minutest detail. A large part of Indian religious literature is unreadable because it consists of taking one idea from one sentence and splitting it into a thousand parts, all neatly catalogued and arranged. The sexual act was approached in the same way. The sensitive zones of the body were studied with an impartiality which was not achieved again until Sigmund Freud. The perversions were investigated and listed, though they were not called perversions but, rather, improvements. The preliminaries to the sexual act were elaborately analyzed, with always the thought in mind that many men are willing to spin out the preliminaries until it is time to go home. The girls were taught how to dress, to perfume, and to flirt, but to do these things in such a beguiling way, with such erotic poses, that the coming sexual act was always to the forefront and, in the end, became inevitable.

It is this ritual which we are shown in the extraordinary sculptures of Khajuraho. The sculptures are all on the outside of the temple, so that it becomes a sort of gigantic billboard. We see everything that the girls do. One comes naked from her bath; another makes up her eyes; another decks herself out with her jewellery; yet another studies herself in a mirror. These are all feminine pursuits which nowadays, when watched by the male, often have a disastrous effect on the passions. The sculptures are a lesson in how it should be done. No action, however trivial, is taken without sensually throwing out one buttock, or advancing the breasts. The proportions of these features vary widely; it would seem that they did not have to conform to any standard of female beauty. But one thing was clearly *de rigueur*: the girls had permanently to be in the shape of the letter S.

From the preparations we pass to the entertainment. Girls are shown playing the flute, dancing and what may be singing. They are shown exciting their lovers. And then they are seen in every conceivable act of love. They at last abandon the 'S' shape for the 'X' shape, to say nothing of several other positions not covered by the English alphabet. We see all, save one thing; we do not see the priest pocketing the money.

Few things bring a man down to earth so much as a night on the tiles. But that, of course, is exactly where the Brahmins wanted him.



## *Whatever Will Our Children Think?*

KHAJURAHO IS AN EXTREME CASE OF SENSUALITY, but there is no doubt that most Hindu art is voluptuous. There was no reason why it should not be. The Brahmins approved and the public did not object. Breasts, bottoms and languor became the keynote of Indian plastic art, except when the sculptors were ordered to do the occasional bull or a horse or an elephant.

In the 1940s, Sitwell found all this greasy, and he was entitled to his opinion because, if it was not greasy, it was certainly not Greek. But what are we to say of it now, in the 1970s?

In the first place, we can dismiss Osbert Sitwell. He is dead, but if he were alive the poor man would have called all his contemporaries just as greasy. The young of today make love with the same abandon as the Khajuraho sculptures, experiment with the same postures, and do it, as I have noted, in very similar strings of beads. Sensuality no longer means something bad: you are sensual, or you are square.

The more intimate sculptures of Khajuraho cannot, at the moment, be reproduced in a book or magazine without the risk of seizure by the customs, but that will pass. Soon we shall no longer hide pictures of the sexual act away in the cupboard for fear our children will see them. Some enterprising youngster at school will already have sold them stills from the latest adult movie. Our teenage offspring who wish to be famous actors and actresses (and which of them does not?) will not only practise facial expressions in front of the bedroom mirror; they will strip off.

Once the fun of the sexual revolution has worn off, inevitably the public will want it all over again, but from their painters and sculptors. Sitwell's feeling that sex in art is greasy will go among those historical curiosities of taste, such as a recent Pope's order that fig leaves should be extended to the statues of little boys in the Vatican Museum.

The artists will oblige. The novelists have already done so, and a young film director who has not an eye for nude bodies artfully entwined soon finds himself shunted off into making TV documentaries. Since artists rarely have original ideas, it seems probable that they will suddenly take a great interest in the sensual Indian art. While desperately bending steel and plastic about to catch the rhythms of copulation, they will find that the Hindus had explored them all centuries ago. In fact, the vogue has already begun. There is very little portable Indian art left in India. In the last few years it has been avidly collected. Just as an industry of faking classical sculpture sprang up in Naples in the nineteenth century, so a quiet but active industry of fakers has grown in India, particularly in the South, where the art of casting in bronze has never quite died out. As for the originals, they are disappearing so fast that the Central Government has had to issue an order forbidding temple Brahmins from selling their sacred statues to itinerant collectors. There are, we know, more Corots in America than he ever painted; so there are more gems of Indian art to be found in the museums of the United



States and in private collections than are to be found in the shabby museums of India itself.

If, then, we are soon all enthusiasts for Indian art, we shall not be surprised: but the Indians will. The vast majority of contemporary Indians have no interest in art whatsoever. I do not mean they are barbarians. They are restoring the ancient monuments because it is good for the national pride, to say nothing of the tourist trade. At Ajanta, I saw this in action. A restorer was at work putting a new base on a column, using cement to replace the stone which had been quite rotted away. He was a hod carrier who had been given a chance to try his hand, and he was twelve years old.

The average Indian is quite bewildered by the Western passion for art, and he is inclined to suspect it is a sham. Indian houses are entirely without interior decoration except for a garish print or two of political leaders, sometimes cut from the front covers of magazines. The very few contemporary artists who are struggling to paint pictures of a non-existent Indian school are held in no respect. Those few who manage to be known outside India are regarded with suspicion. Jamini Roy, a most gifted primitive painter and decorator, managed to have a number of Western clients for his folk art. The story, retailed with relish by his fellow Bengalis, was that one of these clients knocked over and broke a large painted jar. Jamini Roy cut short his apologies, saying, 'Don't worry, my sons will have another ready by tomorrow morning.' Though the tale was invented, it is significant of the Hindu attitude towards the creative impulse.

It extends across the whole spectrum. Ram Gopal, the brilliant dancer, was quite unable to raise funds to keep his company together. When he asked for it from a high official he was told (as he has narrated, with expletives, to me), 'What is a man like you doing dancing? This is stuff for women.' In Munich I was accosted by a similarly angry playwright, who had gone into voluntary exile. A play of his had been accepted for production in England. He was informed that on no account would he be allowed to produce it, and official steps were being taken to frighten off foreigners who tried. The reason? It criticized some aspects of Indian life.

Lastly, my uncle, who regarded himself as an educated man, was told that I had published a novel. Gathering the family about him, he said, 'What is all this nonsense? Why is my nephew writing books? Give him some money and tell him to stop.'

We may expect the brighter spirits of the younger generation to change all that, but the brighter spirits that I have met so far are none too sure that they can do it.



## *Why the Taj Mahal Is a Pity*

ONE DAY I WAS EXAMINING THE TAJ MAHAL IN DETAIL, when a respectable-looking Hindu came up to me and asked if I could spare him a moment. He was obviously a well-educated man, polite but earnest. He wanted me to explain why the building was considered beautiful.

I did my best. I drew his attention to the clever interplay of the architectural design and its decoration. I pointed out that it was monumental, without crushing the spirit like the temples at Karnak or the Colosseum, and without being frigid, like the Parthenon. I went on for quite a while like this. Then he said:

‘Thank you. Every time I look at it, I get so angry it makes my blood boil.’

No one can understand India today unless he can see why that man was angry. To us the Taj Mahal is the summit of Indian architecture. But, of course, it is nothing of the sort. It is a monument built by alien conquerors, to an alien taste, by men who too thought that Hindu art was greasy and beneath contempt, and who, to make things worse, destroyed Hindu buildings with such savagery that in Banaras there is not one ancient temple left of the hundreds that once crowded within it.

We in the West forget this, and it is not our fault. We learn about India from books written by the English, and when the English occupied India, it was the conquering Moslems with whom they had to deal. Nabobs and begums were Moslems, not Hindus. When, in pursuit of trade, the East India Company men put on Indian dress, it was Moslem clothes that they wore. When they learned a little of the language, they spoke a dialect of Persian, not Sanskrit. When they finally took over the country they were struck by the story (true or invented) that the last Great Mogul was begging in the streets of Delhi. As a matter of fact, none of the Moguls had any real right to do even that. If the Taj had been built in our own times, the marble sides would have borne the scrawled words, ‘Mogul, go home.’

Had they done so, they would have gone back to Afghanistan, Persia, and the bleak mountains of Central Asia. From these deserts they had swept down on the fertile plains of India in search of plunder. Coming as robbers, they stayed as parasites, living in jewelled splendour on the backs of the Hindu population. Their tax collection system has no parallel in history for thoroughness and lack of mercy, until we come to our own times. Our tax collectors are worse, but they do not use the money to set up gigantic mausoleums for themselves and their wives.

Ever since the fourteenth century (the century of Chaucer, and Boccaccio and Petrarch) until 1947, the Hindus have been ruled, in part or in whole, by races who heartily detested their culture and did their damndest to stamp it out. The huge Kutb tower in Delhi is built from the ruins of a Hindu temple, destroyed by the invaders. The English left the temples alone because they never have been vandals. They were more thorough. They sent out Macaulay to report on Hindu



culture. He dismissed its literature as a mass of fables, took no more notice of its art than Sir Osbert Sitwell, and came back with the astounding proposition that Hindus should be educated to become 'brown Englishmen'. Even more astoundingly, the proposition was accepted. As a Malabar boy once said to me, showing me his school text of Keats and Shelley, 'Please, what is Spring?'

We all know of Charles the Hammer and how he stopped the Moslems from conquering all Europe. Suppose that he had not, and the Moslems had swept on to John o' Groats. The churches of Europe would have been sacked, as the Saracens sacked St Peter's in Rome. Chaucer would not have got his government post unless he had written praises to the Caliph in Arabic. Duccio would never have painted his *Madonna* because the Moslems forbid the human figure to be portrayed in art.

Suppose, further, that the Moslems had been conquered in due course by the Chinese, who, having invented gunpowder long before, had learned to put it into cannon. A cultured race themselves, they would not have thrown down such cathedrals as remained. They would merely have insisted on the obvious fact that any educated man must master the Chinese classics and the twenty-seven thousand separate characters in which they are written.

The Hindus have suffered all this. Is it, therefore, strange that it has left them with small interest in the arts? They have to endure a further worry. Moslem architecture was very good. Its domes and minarets have come to mean India to the West. A picture of the Taj Mahal in a travel agency is a clear message to book a ticket for New Delhi. It is as though England were to be symbolized not by Salisbury Cathedral, not by Hampton Court, but by the Royal Pavilion at Brighton.

But the Taj Mahal is not wholly Moslem. Here and there, particularly in the kiosks that surround the dome, are touches of Hindu art. This owes nothing to Shah Jehan, whose taste was for Persian things. It is due to a much more intelligent man. One of Shah Jehan's predecessors was Akbar. He had the magnanimity of mind to try and blend Hindus and Moslems together. He employed Hindus at his court and encouraged the Brahmins to expound their beliefs. He decided to build himself a new capital and he has left behind him the stupendous dead city of Fatehpur Sikri. Here he ordered his architects to blend Hindu and Moslem styles. It proved very difficult. The Moslems, as I shall show in the next section, were austere and simple in their architecture: the Hindus, earthbound by their religion, liked to be elaborate. Statues were forbidden, so the Hindu contribution to this short-lived style turned out to be a rash of little pavilions, curvilinear stone brackets and stone stalactites hanging from the ceilings. The result is sometimes successful, but sometimes resembles a Caliph's palace built by Walt Disney.

But, then, Akbar was not a Moslem. Nobody ever knew what religion he really believed in, although he was very earnest in his search for God. He listened to the mullahs, the pundits, and the Jesuits. Finally he decided that God, after all, was himself. He had some plans for declaring this the religion of the State, but he was stopped just in time.

When he died, building in India reverted to the purer Moslem style, except for some minor details. Since this style means India to so many people and will continue to do so until the Indians come up with a new style of their own, it



should be understood. I shall now put aside the man whom the Taj Mahal made so angry, and briefly examine what makes Moslem architecture what it is.

## *Back to Byzantium*

GEORGE IV BUILT THE PAVILION AT BRIGHTON because he thought Moslem architecture was romantic. Onion-domes and minarets were a nice change from Greek and Roman façades for the Prince Regent, and we have gone on thinking like the Prince Regent ever since. That is why we go to see the Taj Mahal by moonlight, although Shah Jehan went to enormous trouble to set off the pearly-white of the central building with two stern deep-red buildings that, in bright sunlight, give the whole thing a bold and masculine look.

One day, many years ago, I was examining myself to find out what I really knew and what I just thought I knew about this subject, when I discovered that I knew nothing at all about the way that Moslem architecture began. I consulted the more cultivated of my friends and discovered that they did not know, either, though they could pinpoint the place where the Ionic capital was developed. We all had a sort of idea that Mohammed founded Islam, waved his sword, and up jumped mosques, domes, minarets and fluted arches, designed by some creative djinn.

I made up my mind to find out for myself, and, since I lived in Sicily, I had only a few short journeys to make. The North African coast was just across the water, and the Near East really was near.

I soon discovered that the trouble was Byzantium. Right up to World War II the West point-blank refused to think about it. There was only one modern book (by Ostrogorsky) that told the whole story in manageable form, and that was not translated into English until 1954. I do not know the cause of this deliberate neglect of a great civilization. Byzantium was also called Constantinople, and perhaps that was just a bit too Oriental to attract our scholars.

But it was the Byzantine Empire that the early Moslems attacked, tooth, claw and scimitar. The Moslems themselves had no culture to speak of. Mohammed insisted to the day of his death that he could neither read nor write. The *Koran* had been written down by an archangel on the shoulder-blades of sheep. As for the arts, the Moslems knew nothing about them and did not want to. They were soldiers of Islam, the religion of the sword; a piece of fine architecture was, to them, a place where one could stable one's horses, that philistine act which has always been so dear to the military mind. They needed a place to worship, but the first mosques were merely fields surrounded by a wooden fence. Austerity was the fashionable thing. When some Moslem soldiers appeared in looted silk robes, the Caliph Omar got off his horse, gathered handfuls of mud and threw it at them.

But the mud-slinging epoch soon passed. Islam conquered an empire, and with empire came the desire to show that they had done it. They turned to building, first mosques and then palaces. Since they had no style of their own,



they had to borrow one. By good fortune, close at hand, under their very swords, was one of the noblest styles ever invented. Like George IV, the Byzantines had grown tired of the eternal columns of classical art, and, picking up a hint or two from the fertile imagination of the Syrians, they had put up such buildings as St Sophia. It fell down, but they put it up again, and it remains today to astonish everybody who walks into it. Buildings like it, smaller, but with the same stark, vaulting beauty, were everywhere in the Moslem empire. Thus, when they came to put up their earliest shrine, over the rock from which Mohammed had taken off on a flight to heaven, they built a masterpiece. Less daring, but with the same Byzantine mastery of volume and space, was the mosque they erected at Kairouan. Later, when they had conquered Egypt, they built mosques in Cairo, which, although now sadly in ruin, lift one's spirit off of this earth. Moslem architecture, at the peak, achieved the spirituality of churches such as Notre Dame of Paris, but with a far greater economy of means.

The style travelled with the boundaries of empire, passing through Persia, until it reached India. On the way it softened a little. It picked up some fripperies, such as the use of coloured tiles to liven the exterior, but on the whole it remained very much what it was when it began—an inspired use of a borrowed idea, to serve a faith which was, and is, one of the most passionate ever held by mankind.

It may be imagined what the Moslems thought of the Hindus' earthy temples. They tore them down for the glory of God, but they would probably have torn them down, anyway, as eyesores.

They were not eyesores: they were great works of art, but built, as we have seen, from an utterly different point of view. The enormous tomb of Humayun at Delhi is more immediately pleasing to the Western eye than the temple at Madurai. And why not? One likes what one likes, and it has its roots in the West. But it is Indian only in the sense that it is in India, just as the quaint little English village Gothic church of St George's is Roman only because it is in the Via del Babuino. It is our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren who will one day visit Khajuraho and Bhuvaneshwar, and Rameshwaram, with the same emotion as we feel today when seeing the Taj.



Bhuvaneshwar, Orissa. One of the most famous temple complexes in India. 72  
The buildings are shrines for gods, or entrance porches. Hindu worship is an individual affair and not a mass ceremony. Large covered spaces, as in cathedrals, were thus never needed

Vijayanagar, the city of victory, was the capital of a southern Indian (Hindu) 73  
dynasty that, from 1336 to 1565, built up a great empire. Sixteenth-century travellers from Europe described the city as being as big and as splendid as Rome. Even today the ruins cover 9 square miles. The city may have had 400,000 inhabitants, and a high level of luxury obtained. It was destroyed by the Moslems after the Hindu forces had been routed at the battle of Talikota (1565). The ruins have not yet been completely excavated



72

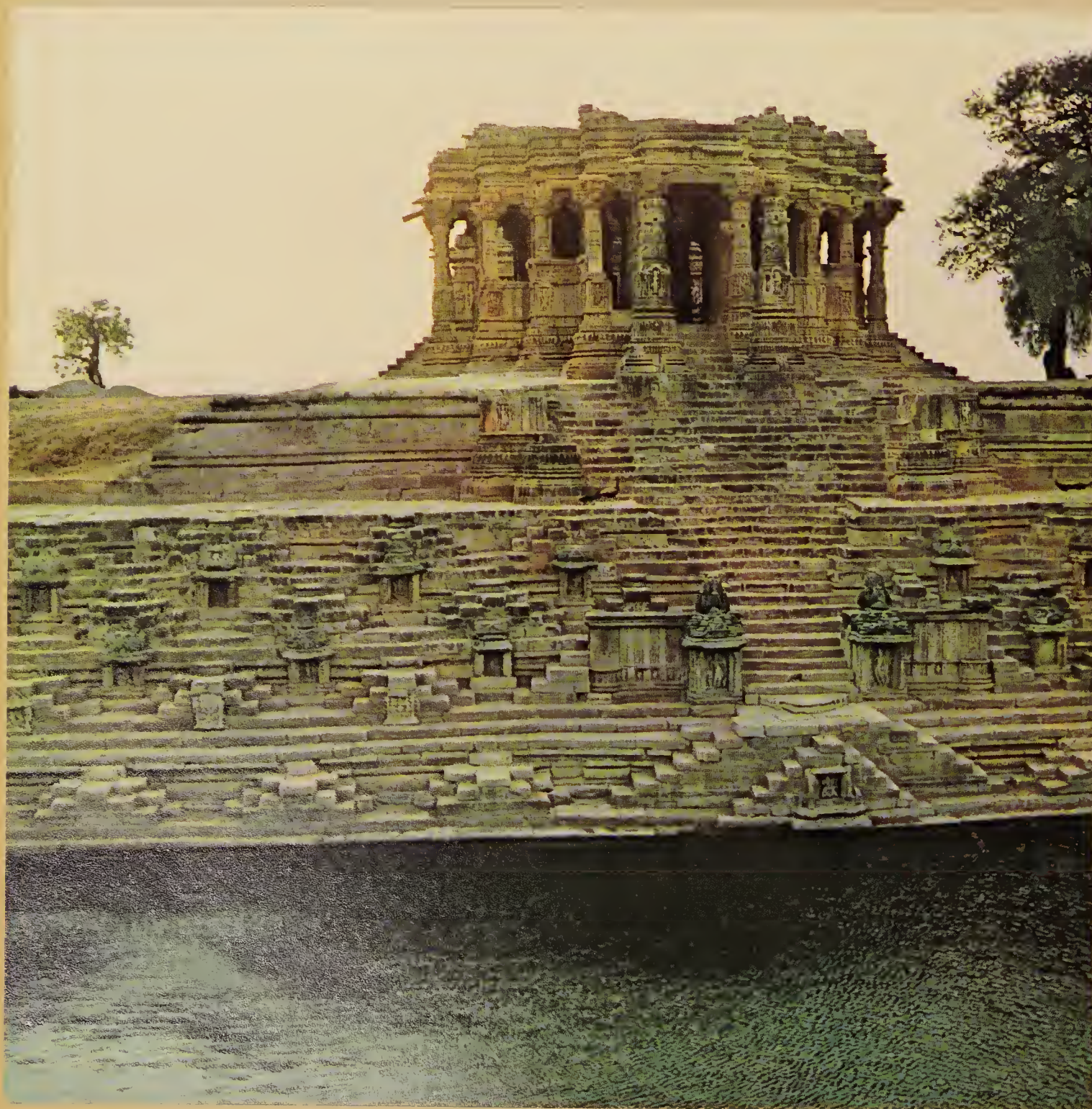


73





- 74 The Sun Temple of Modhera, 60 miles north-west of Ahmedabad. Built about 1026, it is a brilliant example of the Hindu solution to an architectural problem, in this case the conversion of the horizontal line of the water into the verticals of the shrine. It is done in a large number of subtle stages





- 75 The Man Singh Palace in the great fort of Gwalior. It is sometimes called the Painted Palace, although the decoration is in coloured tiles. They give a dazzling effect of colour and light to the otherwise sombre walls (1486-1516). Note the light-hearted procession of ducks





- 76 The entrance tower of the Menakshi Temple in the great temple complex of Madurai. This is one of the principal artistic treasures of southern India. It abounds in sculpture of great exuberance, although the overall impression is one of solemn grandeur. It is not ancient, having been built, mostly, between 1623 and 1660, contemporary, that is, with High Baroque in Europe. It should be remembered that the sculpture and the columns of Indian temples were painted in bright, contrasting colours, like the sculpture and ornaments of the Parthenon. Some temples have recently been repainted





- 77 One of the corridors in the great temple of Rameshwaram, said to have been founded by Rama, the central figure of the epic poem *The Ramayana*. Its vast scale and massive style make it one of the most impressive monuments of India. The corridors in all extend to 4,000 feet, a richly carved promenade that attracts pilgrims and visitors from all over India. Rama is said to have placed a lingam, or stone phallus, here, and this is still washed daily in water brought from the Ganges



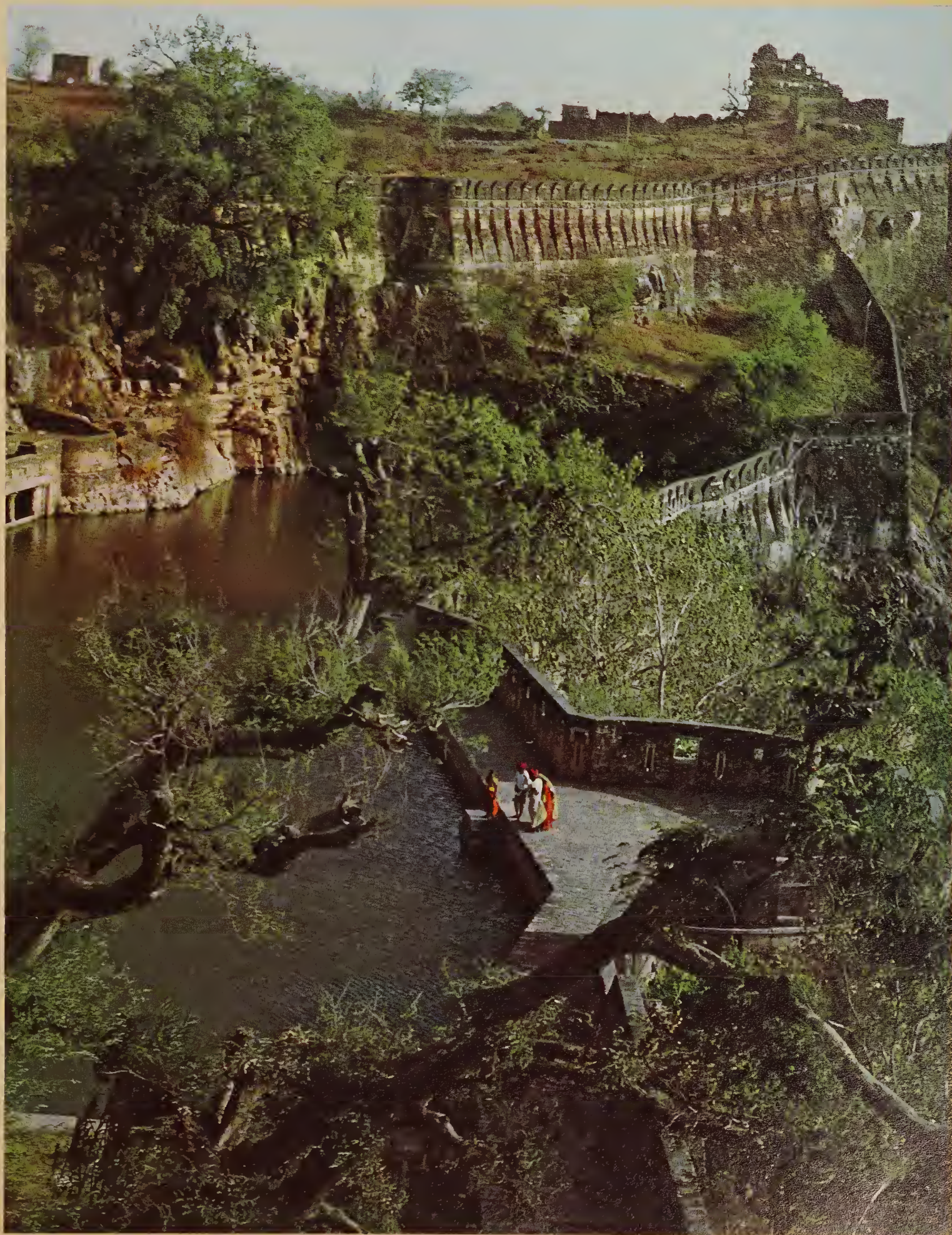


78 There are very few monuments left of Hindu civil architecture, but northern India abounds in examples of military building, and they display the same mastery of technique as the Hindu temples. Here is the remote fortress of Jaisalmer, capital of a Rajput clan. Hindu fortifications were extremely elaborate in design, and many were so strong that they were never taken by assault. Treachery among the defenders, however, was a frequent cause of their fall

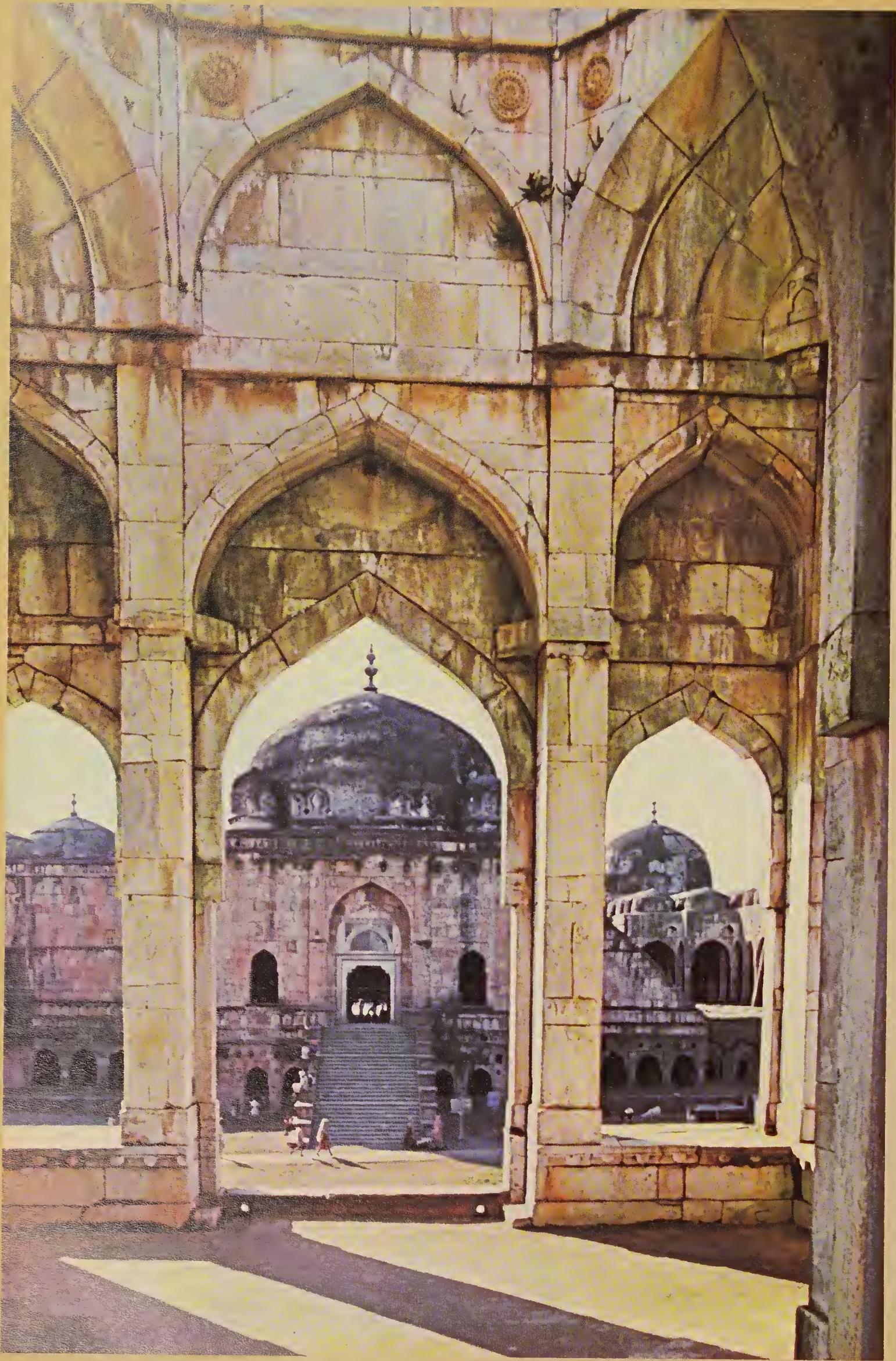




79 Chitor, a Rajput fortress of grim renown. The story of the holocausts of women held there is told on p. 55

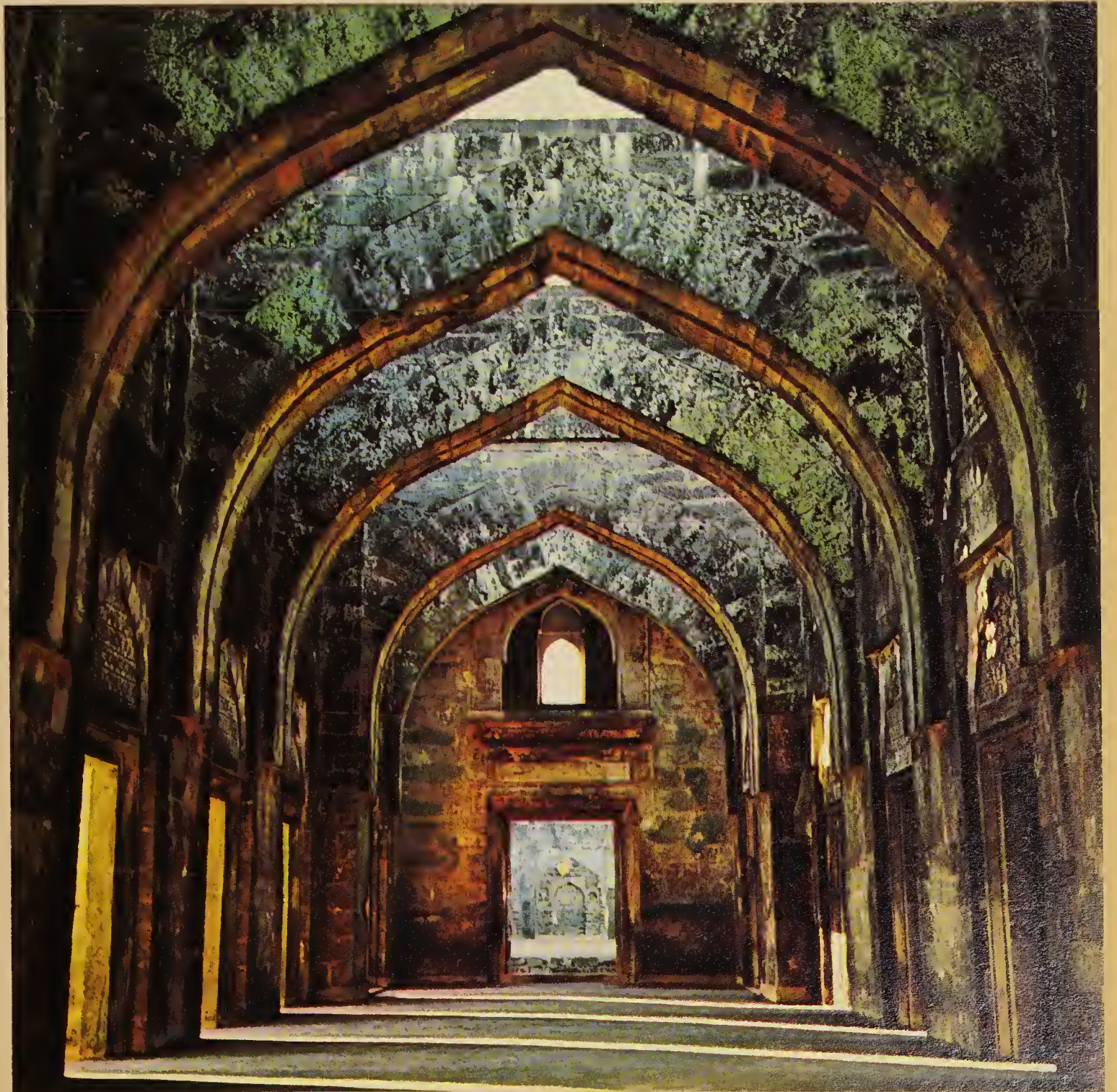








80,81 The deserted city of Mandu, lying on the crest of the Vindhya Mountains. Plate 80 shows the Jami Masjid, built about 1454. It is the finest specimen of the Afghan school of Islamic architecture—more severe than the combination of Moslem and Hindu architecture which arose later. The vaulted hall of the Palace of Bag Bahadur (plate 81) is an excellent (but virtually unvisited) example of the dignity and strength of the style





82 A fortress on the Rup Lake at Dig, Rajasthan. It has 72 bastions. The military exploits of the Rajputs were the first genuine piece of Indian history to reach the Western world. Tod's translation of *The Annals of Rajasthan* revealed a world of fanatical warriors, ceaselessly fighting, either among themselves or against invaders. War, in our times, is no longer considered either heroic or glorious, but to the Rajputs it was the essence of a man's life





83 The Lake at Alwar. To the right is the cenotaph of Maharao Raja Bakhtawar Singh. It was built in the nineteenth century, when local rulers still had complete command of the revenues of their States, and thus accumulated vast fortunes. Maharajahs now take a fixed stipend from the Central Government and have no autocratic powers. To the left is the Vinai Vilas Palace, which contains a famous library of Persian and Sanskrit manuscripts, and also houses a museum of jewelled swords and sabres, some once owned by the great Moguls



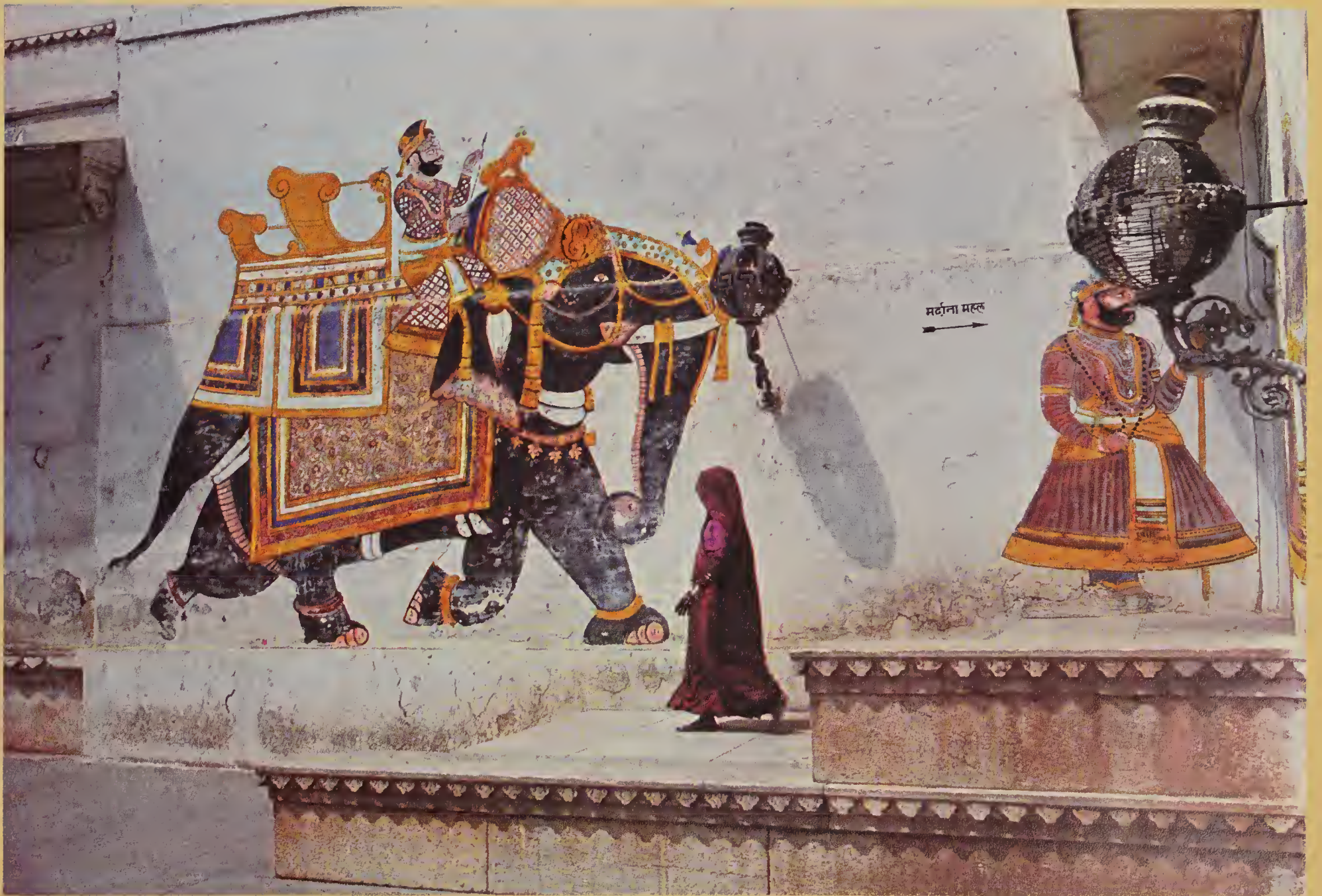




84

- 84,85 The portrayal of the human figure in Hindu art was strictly governed by rules that left the artist little room for invention. He was more free, however, when he dealt with animals, and traditionally he was an excellent observer. The Hindu's attitude towards animals has no sentimentality (except in the case of the cow). He regards them with a somewhat humorous eye, and this shows when he comes to carve or to paint them. Generally speaking, the Hindu has, in history, been kind to animals, for two reasons. One is that it was a tenet of the Brahmins that a good man does not unnecessarily take life or do harm to living creatures. The other is that it was widely believed that, on the death of a bad man, his soul passed into that of an animal, to be born again and to expiate his misdemeanours in an animal's body. In contrast to this, hunting has always been a passion, and Hindu literature is full of glowing references to the pleasures of the chase. Above, a many-coloured prancing horse from the village of Parthnavoor, between Rameshwaram and Madurai; right, an elephant from the City Palace at Udaipur



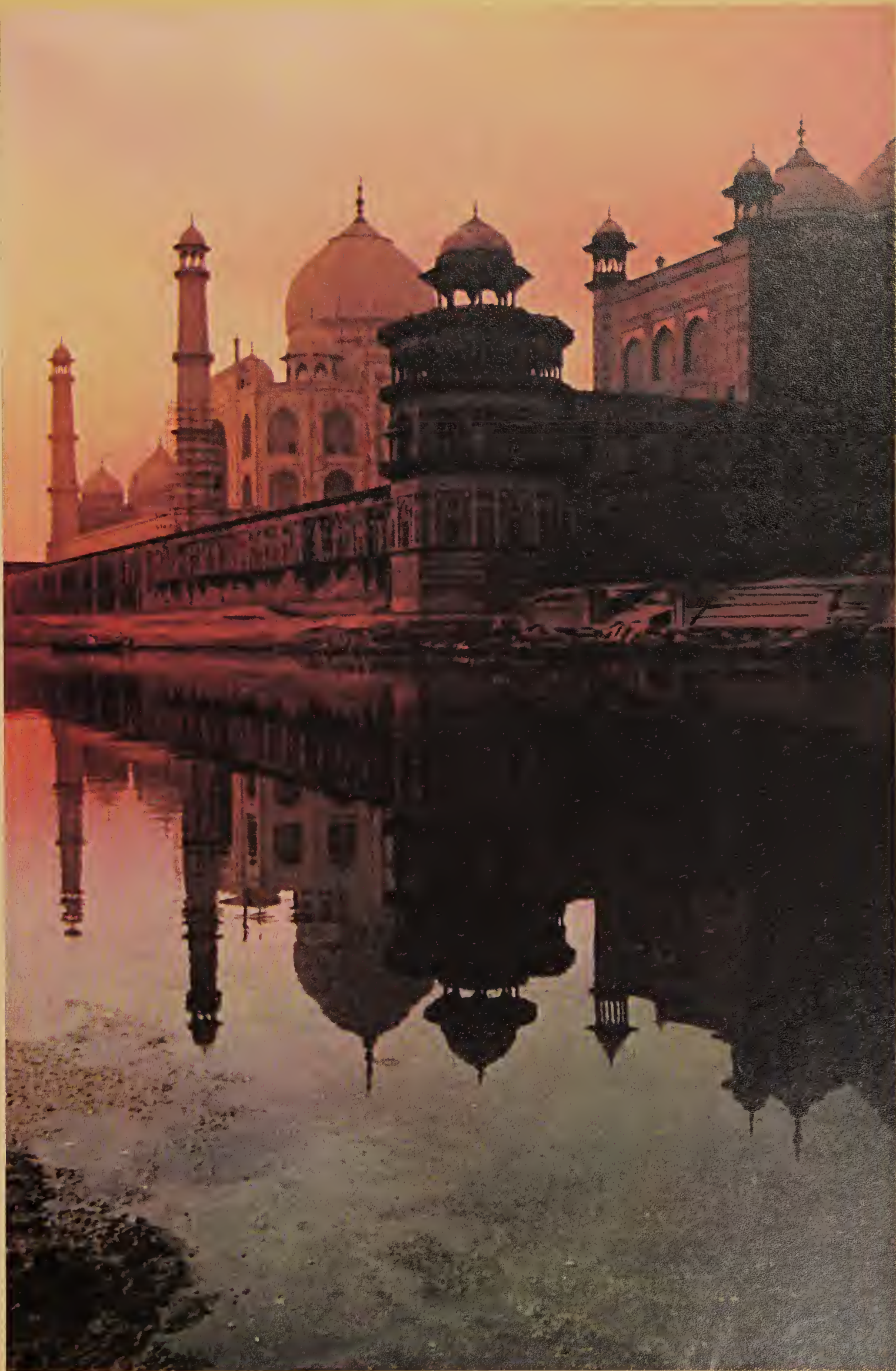




- 86 A finely-worked grille protecting the tomb of Mohammed Ghaus, a Moslem saint. Gwalior
- 87 The Taj Mahal, reflected in the Jumna river just before dawn. Shah Jehan's original plan called for another mausoleum on the other bank for himself, this time in black marble













- 88 The English cemetery at Surat. From the twelfth century onwards, Surat was the centre for foreign traders, who included the Parsees from Persia, the Dutch, the Portuguese and the English. The tombs, now much decayed, are mainly of seventeenth-century traders, who, as can be seen, made a great deal of money
- 89 The nave of the Church of St Francis of Assisi, in Old Goa. Goa once formed part of the Portuguese empire, and Old Goa was the principal town. It is now completely deserted, the centre of activity having moved to the coast, at Panjim. Old Goa in its heyday was the hub of a concentrated missionary campaign by the Portuguese to convert the population to Christianity. The Palace of the Inquisition (now, like most of the town, in ruins) stood near this church, and heretics were burned in the square outside. The Portuguese held on to Goa throughout the period of British rule, but with the coming of independence they were forcibly evicted by Indian troops











- 90 The Baisakhi festival at the Golden Temple, Amritsar. This is an annual gathering of Sikhs. Originally a pacific sect of Hindu heretics who did not believe in caste or ritual worship, they were turned into a martial fraternity by Govind Singh (1675–1708). His writings were gathered together in a book, the Granth, which the Sikhs hold in great reverence. The assiduous cultivation of the martial spirit by all Sikhs led them to be soldiers who were much admired by British Army officers. The Sikhs distinguished themselves in both World Wars, but are now a thorn in the side of the Central Government. They have emigrated in large numbers to Britain, where their turban (which is compulsory wear to the orthodox) is now a familiar sight in the streets. (See also Plates 109, 110)



91-94 Four stages in modern Indian taste. Plate 91: the atrium of the palace at Baroda, a striking example of eclecticism. Plate 92 is from New Delhi, an attempt by Sir Edwin Lutyens to blend Western and Eastern styles, and is a lesson on how to fall with dignity between two stools. The statue of King George V, for which the monument was built, has recently been acquired by Canada. Plate 93 shows the pillars at the new city of Chandigarh in the Punjab. It was designed by



91



92



93



94



Le Corbusier. Lastly (94), the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, designed in the international style, which greatly appeals to contemporary Indians

- 95 A curious premonition of modern architecture is to be found in the astronomical observatories erected by Jai Singh II. Here is the great Gnomon at Jaipur, built in the early eighteenth century. It was used for astrological predictions





96,97 The Indian economy, since independence, has been run by a series of Five-Year Plans, calling for gigantic investment in both the private and the public sectors. India found herself without the trained personnel to conduct these plans, so an immediate start was made on improving higher education. The response from the younger generation was overwhelming and new universities are springing up all over India to accommodate the flood of students. Below, the new university outside Bombay under construction.





Another high priority was to provide the land with water so that the urgent need for growing more food could be met. An ambitious programme of dam-building was set in motion, with capital from internal and external sources, including loans from America and the USSR. Below, the great dam at Nagar-junikonda





# THREE

Sir Salar Jang Museum in Hyderabad: ceremonial swords belonging to a nineteenth-century administrator of what was then the richest princely state in India. The museum also contains a significant collection of paintings, porcelain, armour and other antiquities acquired from all parts of the world 98



# The People









# *A Five-Finger Exercise in Political Theory*

AFTER I HAD TAKEN RAM LAL into the Viceregal Palace to watch the birth of a free India, I went to Europe. Everywhere that I went I was asked what I thought the future of India would be, and everywhere I said that, in the long run, it was promising. But the great danger, as I saw it, was that the country would tend to break apart into various regional sections. There was, I said, a centrifugal tendency in the people.

Now, some twenty years later, Madras is clamouring to be a separate country, while Maharashtra wants to have as little to do with the centre as possible. Both mean what they are saying, because there is blood on the streets. I was a good prophet: but my aim now is to show that I was a poor thinker.

The trouble was that I thought that if India broke up into several parts, it would be a disaster: so did everybody I spoke to: so do most people, even today. But I shall shoulder the blame myself.

I was much under the influence of a political theory which I shall call Universal Togetherness. The salvation of the world was that nations (usually called 'petty nationalities') yielded up their sovereignty to larger and larger groups until all combined into a world government. It was a process rather like making an enormous omelette: you broke egg after egg into the mixture and in the end everything turned out delicious. The thing was once explained to me personally by H. G. Wells, who came, towards the end of his life, to believe that he had thought of it himself. Neither Wells nor anybody else explained what would happen if one of the eggs turned out to be rotten. It was assumed, I think, that it would magically turn wholesome. Omelettes are the only thing I know how to cook, but in years of making them, I have never known this to happen.

We did not know it, and we would have been angry if we had been told, but we were thinking as imperialists, from H. G. Wells down to a humble listener like myself. We could not help ourselves, and many people still cannot. We were in an age of empires. The German Empire had gone, but was to come again. The British Empire was at its height. The French Empire flourished, and even the Japanese, unopposed by any public opinion, were carving themselves an empire out of China. All these empires we detested, but we could not bring ourselves to say that each people should go the way it wanted. We felt that they should sink themselves in that much nobler thing, the Human Race. I was, I remember, very keen about the human race in those days. I am not so keen about it now, but then, I have since seen so much more of it.

Let us do some of this sinking ourselves and see what really happens. Let us suppose that we have a large land to organize on the very best model we can make. We find it divided into four parts, the inhabitants of which glory in the name of Northerners, Southerners, Easterners, and some people who are so proud of themselves that they call themselves simply Us. Persuaded by the obvious

Shah Jehan was a connoisseur of art, and of women. While Mumtaz Mahal was alive, he was comparatively faithful—she bore him fourteen children. But when she died he flung himself into debauchery. He was imprisoned by his eldest son, who seized the throne from him. He was kept in prison until his death, although his son allowed him a generous ration of prostitutes. Legend has it that he often gazed at the Taj through the bars of his cell



superiority of our political ideas, all these four combine into a single state which we call Atlantis. The government is drawn democratically from all four sections, and at first all goes well. Customs barriers are removed, tolls disappear, justice is administered without being distorted by local customs and cabals, the armed forces are much more efficient, and the voice of Atlantis is respected in the world.

The years roll on, in peace and contentment and progress. But it is Us that make the most progress, as they always knew they would. They have the better climate; they take great pride in their work, and they have mineral resources. Their chief town, known as Ours, grows into a great industrial city. Its property, of course, belongs to all Atlantis. Northerners, Southerners and Easterners flock to it to find jobs and make their fortune, and Ours grows bigger than ever. The immigrants do their best to imitate the manner and customs of Ours, and become more and more indistinguishable from Us, for that is the only means of making one's way in the big city. No harm is done by this; indeed, it helps the unity of Atlantis.

A generation or two passes. Let us look south to the Southerners. People are still being born there. We pinpoint one young man of twenty. He is ambitious, he has ability, and everybody speaks highly of his prospects. Life seems very promising to him until he visits the big city. There he realizes that he has a provincial accent, provincial manners and provincial ideas. He looks for a job but he has no connections, so he can get only the lowest-paid ones. He seeks out other Southerners for companionship, but he finds that his provincial ways embarrass them, for they are striving might and main to become city slickers. They urge him to become one of Us, and he tries but he does not succeed because his Southern character is too ingrained in him. One day he is overcome by a wave of nostalgia: he packs his bag and goes home.

He has been defeated, but defeat makes him think. He listens to the familiar provincial accent and does not find that it is so much worse than the way they talk in the big city. He listens again and finds that in fact it is better: it is warmer and more human. The manners of the people are clumsy, but they are not artificial. He looks for a job and finds a dozen people ready to help him. His abilities begin to expand in the friendly atmosphere. He does well, then better, then better still, and older people say, 'We always knew you would.' He is elected mayor, then a deputy to the national congress. Here he observes with growing indignation how the deputies of Us, with money and influence behind them, pass laws of the land to suit themselves and ride roughshod over the Northerners, the Easterners, and, above all, his beloved South. At 45, he resigns his seat with a fiery, Southern speech in the thickest of accents, goes home and sets up a party. The slogan is 'Secession—*now*'.

What are we to say about him, we who founded Atlantis? We can say he is wrong. In that case we imply that he must either stay neglected and despised, or adopt the ways of his betters, make himself one of Us, shut his mouth and be content with being a failure. But that also implies that we have not founded a State: we have created an empire. If we say he is right, we shall go a long way to understanding what is happening to 'India' in the last third of the twentieth century.



# *A Sour Look from the South*

I HAVE SHOWN THAT UNITY is not always the fine thing that we think: it all depends from where you look at it. In our imaginary Atlantis, the view from the South was not at all pleasing. In the very real India, it is just the same.

I cannot have read all the books written about modern India, but I have read a great part of those published abroad. I do not remember one of them written from the point of view of the South Indian, although it is high time one was written. My father comes from Kerala, so I am a South Indian. Let us set the ball rolling.

For a very long time my father lived in England, paying occasional visits every three years or so to his homeland. In England, in the daytime, he spoke English. But when he talked in his sleep he spoke in Malayalam. This is one of a group called the Dravidian languages of India. My mother could not understand it, which caused her some annoyance, since like all good wives she dearly wanted to know what her husband said while dreaming. She was not alone in her ignorance. The overwhelming majority of Indians cannot understand Malayalam either.

The other principal tongues of the Dravidian group are Tamil, Canarese and Telegu. Most Indians cannot make head or tail of these, either. It is not as though they were dialects spoken by obscure groups. They are the native tongue of over forty million people, a group which amounts to a large nation, very nearly equal to France, or Italy, or England, and much bigger than Spain, or Norway, or a dozen other countries that have full national sovereignty. They have a large literature of their own, stretching back centuries. They may very well be the oldest tongues spoken on the Indian peninsula.

Now, the people of all those other countries I have just listed speak, like the Americans, a language which is Indo-European in its roots. They are a family, and words in them can easily be traced back to Sanskrit, which is the classical Indo-European tongue. The Dravidian group has no such origins. In fact, nobody has yet succeeded in tracing it back to anything but itself. When I was in Hungary, I found the Hungarians very proud of the fact that nobody in the world spoke their fiendishly difficult language, except, perhaps, the Finns who in their icy wastes spoke something a little like it. The Dravidians can be even more exclusive: there are not even any Finns to point to.

I shall now turn to the rest of the Indians—those who stare blankly when they hear Tamil or Malayalam spoken. ‘Hindi’, says the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, slightly raising its voice, ‘is the national language of India.’ It is not. If it were, India would be a much smaller place than is shown on the maps.

Hindi is a dialect spoken in the Delhi area that is derived from a vast number of other dialects and is based on Sanskrit. Delhi was the capital of India when it was ruled by the Moslems. The Moslems spoke Persian. For Indians and Moslems to talk to each other at all, a language had to be evolved. This was Urdu, a mixture of Persian, Hindi and soldiers’ slang that developed into quite a literary language.



Then came the British. Out of all this muddle they contrived a third. This was 'Hindustani', a language unique in the world since it is only useful for giving orders. You cannot write in it (except commands); you cannot be polite in it. But you can rule in it. That is why it became known as the *lingua franca* of India, and it is still described as such in Western schoolbooks. Again, it is not. Nobody in the South understands it, except soldiers.

While the British were in India, the educated classes spoke English to them. This was by no means due to imperial arrogance. On the contrary, a British civil servant in India had to have some knowledge of what was called the vernacular, and he could not get his full pay until he had acquired it. But the British are not gifted linguists, and the result was so excruciating that Indians found it preferable to learn English—no great feat, because, of all the languages spoken in the world, English is the easiest to learn.

But it was spoken by an élite, and that would not do for a free democracy. When independence came, the legislators decreed that English would remain an official language. After that it would be replaced by Hindi.

A little thought would have shown that this would, in fifteen years, raise a hornet's nest. But the little thought was not taken. It seemed obvious that the choice should fall on Hindi. The legislators, be it noted, were in Delhi, and the big shots among them all spoke Hindi. It was, if we remember our experiment in the last section, the language of Us.

Time passed all too quickly. A project had to be laid before the House of Representatives, extending English, but promising that it would be absolutely abolished after a few more years and Hindi would take its place as the one national language.

As it happened, I was in the spectators' gallery of the House during the debate. It was a violent one. The Hindi speakers sat glumly as one after another of the Dravidian-speaking representatives got up and denounced them as tricksters. Their argument had great point. Government jobs are allotted by examination. If the examinations were in Hindi, the sons of the smug legislators who had thought up the law would have a head start over the sons of the Southerners, who would have learned Hindi painfully at school.

At a certain point, one of the members, a portly, middle-aged man, seized a copy of the proposed law, strode out of the House, and squatted on the lawn outside. Here he solemnly burned the law in a brass bowl. When asked what he was doing, he said he was purifying it. The next day Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the Prime Minister, rose in the House and complained testily that some people really did not understand democratic processes at all.

No doubt the bonfire-lighter did not. But those little flames on the lawn spread throughout the country, and in 1969 they had become a forest fire. Gujarati and Marathi are two other widely spoken languages. They are not detached from Hindi like the Dravidian group, but they are sufficiently different for it to matter a lot to schoolboys. The Gujaratis and Marathis took up the challenge. They protested, as we say today in the West. The Indians call it, plainly and simply, rioting, and they should know, because way back in the early nineteen-thirties, Indian students invented the modern protest—banners, sit-ins, fighting the police,



stone-throwing, burning cars, and—what I think is still something of an Indian specialty—setting light to municipal streetcars. The revolt grew with the years until it developed into a straight demand for cession from the union on the part of the Dravidian-speaking South.

How it will end I cannot say, or even predict, because that is part of current events, which have no place in an essay such as this. All I can say is that it should be taken very seriously.

It must be taken seriously in particular because the simple solution is no solution. The Prime Minister of India might one day bang his or her fist on the desk and say, 'For heaven's sake let us be sensible. We are a nation. We have got to have a national language, like it or not. Count heads, and Hindi wins. There are one hundred million people who speak it. Very well. Send your children to school and *make* them learn it. What else are we to do, in all reason?'

I talked to Jawaharlal Nehru about the matter shortly before he died, and there was no doubt he would have loved to see some such action taken. It suggests itself to any cultured and well-educated man. Pandit Nehru himself had never tried to think and talk in a foreign language—he spoke English at his mother's knee. I have. I have just been doing it, with an Italian friend who visited my Rome apartment.

Twenty years ago I set out, in Italy, to learn the language. Twenty years later I can say with confidence that it never can really be done, and it is the same with any other language that you are not taught to lisp in your cradle.

You may be so fluent you can defend yourself in a court of law. But you are not thinking your own thoughts. You are thinking in a foreign language. You must, for, as every expert will tell you, one language does not translate directly into another. To speak like an Italian without intolerable hesitation, I must think like an Italian.

When my father spoke English he thought like an Englishman. In his sleep he spoke Malayalam, for it was there, deep down in his unconscious mind. And it is that which makes us you, and me, and what we are.



# *The Lonely Boys of Aurangabad*

BUT NOW I SHALL LET FOUR YOUNG SOUTHERNERS speak for themselves. This is what happened to me one evening not so long ago in Aurangabad.

Aurangabad was once the capital of a Great Mogul, and I had spent the day walking among the crumbling ruins of the days of his glory. In the evening I took a taxi to the heart of the town, paid it off—and in two minutes I was utterly lost in a jostling, happy mass of people who filled the main street, taking, like me, an evening stroll and doing some shopping. Anyone who had gone to bed could not have slept, for the little cafés had loudspeakers from which bellowed popular songs. The din was ear-splitting, so everybody had to talk at the top of his voice.

I passed a temple with a frightening statue of the monkey god, Hanuman, all ablaze with lights. I watched a gambling game in which pictures of Nehru, the god Krishna, Mao Tse-tung and an adipose beauty taking a bath were spread on the ground and could be won and carried home. It was an inspiriting scene.

Then a bicycle drew up beside me. Somebody jumped off it.

‘What is your name, sir?’ he said to me. He was dressed in a shirt and white trousers. He had a gentle, rather sad face. He was, I suppose, in his late twenties.

I told him my name.

‘Then I was right. Please to come with me. My friends are waiting.’

He did not say who his friends were, and I did not ask. We walked a long way beside the bike. He explained that he had recognized me as I got out of the taxi, told his friends and then searched the main road until he had found me.

We turned into a sort of tenement. People were lying and sitting on a verandah. We picked our way among them and went into a brightly-lit room. It was ten feet square. It was the home of the young man with the bike and his three companions, this room and nothing more.

Two of the friends were much of his age. The third was older and losing his hair. There were beds on the floor, and one chair, which was drawn up to a small square desk. I was asked to sit in the chair. It was a strange position, for it meant that I had my back to the room and to my hosts. Then I understood. On the table was a magazine with my picture in it. If you have only one chair and you are entertaining a writer, what could be more courteous than to ask him to sit at your one and only desk?

So I sat down and, in due course, edged the chair so that I could see the four friends. They all had the same modest air and touch of sadness. They answered questions readily.

They were all from the deep South of India. Three were Hindus. The older man was a Christian. They had all had an academic education and waited in vain for a job. So, together, they had taken a course in elementary electrical engineering. Together they had found jobs with a new government enterprise. Together they had packed their cardboard suitcases and come here to Aurangabad to live among a strange people fifteen hundred miles from home.

Were they happy?



They smiled. One shrugged his shoulders. 'We needed the money,' he said. The eldest added, 'It's not much, as you can see. But at least we have something in our pockets.'

I looked around the room. There was a calendar on the wall, some coloured magazine covers and a picture of the first Indian general.

'Do you know General Cariappa?' I asked.

The boy who had found me answered with a laugh, 'Heavens no. He's a hero of mine.'

'Why?'

'He's got to the top.'

I asked them how they spent their time.

'Working.'

'Reading.'

'We all play cards.'

'With the people in Aurangabad?'

Another laugh.

'Never.'

'They hate us.'

'We're strangers.'

'Even the girls?' I asked.

'They're the worst of the lot.'

'Then you are, all four of you, lonely?'

'We stay together.'

'We're good friends.'

'We talk a lot about our future.'

'What do you mean to do?'

'Well,' said the eldest, 'after our contract is finished here—that's in ten years' time—we're thinking of moving on to Calcutta or Delhi. We'll get more money.'

They would, I knew. There is a shortage of skilled labour in those towns. And they would get more loneliness too.



## *Caste and the Girl Next Door*

IT MIGHT BE THOUGHT that to be far from home and lonely is not a very special thing. But in India, it is. Other countries have their division between north and south. I was in the state of Mississippi during a time of great tension. My host, a white, gave me a lurid statement of what I can only call Confederate views. But that was while his wife was out of the room, getting the canapés. When she came back, his humour changed, his view cooled. 'My wife', he said, a little sheepishly, 'doesn't agree with me.' His wife was a New Yorker, and the one with the money. It is small things like this that make for moderation and harmony. In the Western world a young man sets out to find a wife who is as much in tune with his way of thinking as the girl next door, and knows the secrets of mother's cooking. But if he is a man at all, he is likely to end up with a wife who disagrees with him every time he opens his mouth, and cooks like a Hottentot. That is as it should be. Remorselessly, the West, against the advice of parents, priests and wiseacres, has insisted that a man has a right to marry outside his own narrow circle. Endless plays and novels have been written about it, and even a carol. English schoolboys in the 'thirties were wont to sing, 'Hark the herald angels sing/Mrs Simpson stole our King.'

In India, for at least fifteen centuries and maybe more, marrying the girl next door was elevated into a rule of life: and so I come to the caste system.

First, I must dispose of some rubbish. People who have never been to India, but have only read about it, have the impression that Indians are as divided into castes as an army is into grades. Moreover, these castes are easily recognizable because of something called 'caste marks', painted symbols on the forehead. 'She wore', they say, having met an Indian woman, 'her caste mark', referring to a spot of colour between her eyebrows. This has about as much sociological significance as false eyelashes. It is the same with the vertical or horizontal stripes one sometimes sees in photographs of men. These have nothing to do with caste, either. They are a piece of religious frippery, like wearing a holy medal round one's neck.

Nor is it any use painfully acquiring a knowledge of caste divisions and learning about *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas* or *sudras*. I have worked in India for years on end with Indians, day and night, and I cannot remember these words, so popular with Western writers, ever once being mentioned.

As for untouchability, that, too, must be regarded with caution. The times are changing. I have travelled by air across India, sitting next to a prominent Brahmin of the most orthodox views. When the hostess brought us our food, he took the tray without so much as a single question about the pretty girl's caste. She was untouchable all right, because he tried.

Caste is the ultimate development of a universal human failing, which is snobbery. In fact, the caste system is a Western snob's heaven. A snob's great fear is that an outsider will get in. In Hindu snobbery, an outsider *cannot* get in.



It is not a question of achieving status. You do not try to keep up with the Joneses: you take elaborate care to keep *in* with the Joneses, if, that is, you are a Jones. Nobody but a Jones can get in the magic circle: but you can be thrown out.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that caste is a dying institution, but this is no cause for the liberal-minded to hang out flags. India has not been swept by egalitarianism. It has been swept by a desire to make money. Doing business has been a passion among Hindus since the time of Augustus Caesar, when they were known as such smart traders that they threatened to ruin the economy of Rome. Since independence, this passion has been given its head. There have been attempts to curb it, but they are mere gestures. When Nehru, a socialist, set up a system of licensing in various sectors of business, the Hindus promptly set up a new trade—in selling licenses—and it still goes on. So it is that the Brahmin will take his ritual cleansing bath of the evening, not because he may have been defiled in the course of the day, but because he is going out to meet a prospective customer, just like his American opposite number. The *kshatriya* politician will dandle any baby on his knee, not for love of the human race, but because the untouchables' candidate can make a nasty split in the vote. Universal suffrage and Better Business methods are doing more to destroy caste than two centuries of high-mindedness.

But caste did exist, and its effects must be reckoned with. I think those effects may well be shaping the future of India.

In the old days, the caste system separated the classes according to their function in the social machinery. All the world has done this: the Greeks, with their citizens, foreign residents, and slaves; the Romans, with their patricians, equites, and plebs; the Middle Ages with their lords and villeins; the Industrial Revolution in England with its owners and proletariat. Even the United States, with its gigantic effort to produce an equal society, has now discovered that it harbours the most shameful inequality of all, that based on race. It is not this aspect that I wish to deal with.

Caste also, in theory, bound a man to follow the trade in which he was born. But in practice there were so many exceptions that it could never have weighed too heavily. Traders became so immensely wealthy that they carved out kingdoms of their own and ruled them as princes. In the South, even the lowest castes of all founded dynasties. India was largely a rural community, and in the countryside, sons tend to follow the profession of their fathers, for it is the only one that is easy to learn thoroughly. We may leave this side of it to the historians to disagree about.

But caste bound a man to marry within his own group, and even within his sub-group. It did not limit his sex life. He could enjoy himself with prostitutes or women who had lost their respectability. The *Kama Sutra* (if read and not leafed through for the dirty bits) will be found to give a fascinating picture of this sort of society, portraying its sexual freedom and its rigidity about marriage. The parameters of a wife are concisely described.

A wife then, if not physically the girl next door, had all her mental limitations. Husband and wife might throw the cooking pots at each other's heads, but fundamentally they saw things alike. Tribal customs ruled the household, to a degree paralleled only by that other group that were required to marry within



the sub-caste, namely, the royal families of Europe. We have massive evidence in that field of the way that all initiative is stifled, except for rebels, who became outcasts.

Worse still, it narrowed a man's territorial vision. His world was his immediate surroundings, or at best, his province. No new ideas would be brought in through a woman from a distant part, with a diverse background. His home would be redolent of his caste dialect, his caste prejudices, his caste dislike of those of other castes, its horror of those from other worlds of living.

It must not be thought that one's caste was a sort of Rotary Club membership, so that wherever one travelled one could hope to find a friend. It is astonishing, but true, that there was no organization whatsoever behind caste. One was taught the rules as a child by a Brahmin, and that was all. A Hindu travelling to another part of India found himself among indifferent strangers, whether they were of his caste or not. If they were indeed of his caste, he would probably manage to offend their susceptibilities. Caste customs varied from province to province and what was permitted in one was scandalous in another. This, added to the fact that the strangers spoke an incomprehensible language, greatly encouraged the idea that there was no place like home.

Thus 'Indians', until 1885, rarely felt themselves as such. Instead they were Bengalis, Gujeratis, Rajputs, Madrasis, Travancoreans, Mahrattas and so forth. 'India' was a clear idea in the minds of Europeans, Russians, Chinese and Japanese. But in India itself 'India' did not really exist. When India became free there was some embarrassment about finding a native name for it. 'India' was a word from the Greek: it was not found in the ancient Hindu texts. Finally, 'Bharat' was chosen and that in itself sums up the situation—Bharat was the name of a conglomeration of petty kingdoms in the North. The masses in the South had never heard of it, and its use, today, still sounds a little forced and declamatory.

In 1885 the first meeting of the Indian National Congress took place, and the idea of India as one country began to take shape. In 1947, India as one country (though with two big bits lopped off) became independent. In the nineteen-sixties mobs poured through the streets of Madras demanding that the Tamils set up as a separate nation, and a well-organized and flourishing political party was in being to back them.

And why not? The world deplored the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia had no existence until President Wilson thought of his Fourteen Points. It was then founded out of the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The world regretted it was now being ruled from Moscow. Nobody suggested it should be ruled from Vienna. Should Madras be ruled from New Delhi? We shall see: but it may be that the break-up of the British Empire has not yet finished.



# The Indian Revolution

I SHALL NOW BRIEFLY DESCRIBE that Empire and its end. By that I do not mean I shall discuss whether one jack-in-office was a Good Viceroy and another a Bad Viceroy. Viceroys were neither good nor bad—they were merely ridiculous. No one man can govern 400,000,000 people, especially if he is a complete foreigner, has not an atom of previous knowledge of the country, and does not speak the language. They had full power, and, as Churchill remarked, full power is heady stuff. It can be said to their credit that their power did not go to their heads. It did, however, go to their feet. They invented a sort of slow stalk which they used when walking, even, incredible as it may seem, when they went in to dinner in their own house. It was meant to symbolize the majesty of the Raj and it looked very like arthritis—aptly, perhaps.

Nor shall I weigh whether foreign rule was, on balance, a benefit or a loss. You may take away a man's freedom for two reasons only: you must prove he is a criminal or you must prove he is mad. That would be a difficult thing to do for one-fifth of the human race. The Empire was something that happened because the Indians were divided: it continued because the Indians were inert. They could not unite to throw the foreigners out, and we have seen some reasons why this was so. It was ended by something which will come as a surprise to many Western readers.

English people visiting India today as tourists come back and tell me, with wonder, that they met no resentment. I listen to this with as straight a face as I can manage, for they clearly imply that *they*, or their fathers, were the Raj. It is a harmless delusion but it was never shared by the Indians. They never thought that India was ruled by the British people. It was ruled by a self-perpetuating clique of upper-class public-schoolboys.\* The Indians observed the disdain with which this clique treated any of their own countrymen who were below their social level. They were amused to see these elegants snap up the Hindustani term for a commercial traveller and use it with derision for British businessmen—'box-wallah'. Indians who went to England noted, with glee, how this contempt was paid back by the despised British. The 'India-man', the 'nabob', was regarded as a pompous bore, and, when he retired to England, was forced to live among similar bores in remote places such as Cheltenham and Bath. The Raj was not the British public. It was a small club in which you did not pay to be a member; you were handsomely paid.

What were they like, the gilded public-schoolboys? I shall give two examples, both from Bombay, a town in which I lived for many years. As I walked about the streets I used to think about them. The English in India were

\*A 'public' school in Great Britain is one of a hundred or so exclusive private schools, such as Eton, Harrow, Wellington and so forth. They once deliberately set out to train boys to run the Empire. Their present aims are obscure.



not cruel: the trouble was that they were quaint. The main open space of the city is dominated by a long line of University buildings. A tropical sun beats down on it from a tropical sky. Brown-skinned students swarm from its gateways dressed in brightly coloured Oriental clothes. But the English had chosen to build the University in Victorian Gothic Revival. It is a mountainous mass of pointed arches, finials and Heaven knows what other Northern fancies.

Did the English set up a Committee-for-Selecting-a-Design-for-a-University-Expressing-Utter-Contempt-for-the-Professors-and-Students? Did its members labour for months and finally, in the country which had built the temple at Madurai, come up triumphantly with the idea of Gothic Revival? I don't think so. I think it came to someone, say the Governor, in a flash. The English, in their dealings with the Indians, were naturally, effortlessly wrong, as to the manner born.

Thus, on the question of manners and customs, the Hindus had a number of objectionable ones, and it would have been reasonable if the English had decided to adopt none of them. This is not what happened. Certain Hindus followed the insulting rule of not eating and drinking with anybody who was not of their particular social group. Unerringly, the English dived on this and adopted it.

The Yacht Club was the centre of their social life. Indians were not allowed to eat in it. An English artist and his wife announced that they would defy this rule and invite me to dinner. It was in the middle of a Civil Disobedience movement and a public row would have been splashed in the Indian newspapers. I dined, but behind a screen.

The practice did not serve to elevate them. On the contrary, it reduced them all to the level of the most bigoted and narrow-minded Brahmin clerk in their counting houses. They could not have made a more bizarre choice if they had decided that English *mem-sahibs* should be burned alive on their husbands' graves.

Or again, Bombay was and is full of a wide variety of Indian races—Gujeratis, Marathis, Goans and others. A number of different religions are practised there—Hinduism, Mohammedanism, Jainism and so forth. The English could have taken their choice to make their friends and favourites. They ignored the lot and selected an obscure sect which was not Indian at all—the Parsees, who were refugees from Persia. At that time, they were neither rich nor handsome, nor particularly well educated. They performed menial tasks such as taking bumboats out to visiting ships and chaffering over supplies. Their religion was arcane and their customs grisly—they exposed their dead on platforms to be torn to pieces and devoured by vultures. These, and these alone, the English took to their hearts (but not, of course, to their tables: their Brahminy rules were rigid). The consequence was that this favoured sect of foreigners prospered exceedingly and soon became deputy masters of Bombay.

But these lords of the earth (as a British historian has sarcastically called them) must be left to the British themselves to write about. Only they have the necessary venom: the younger writers are sharpening their knives and some blood has already been drawn. For the Indians it will be a private fight between those two warring nations that, for Disraeli, made up England. For the young Indian who did not know the Raj, it is an embarrassment. He does not understand why his fathers and forefathers let themselves be ruled by such empty men. But he does



not brood about it. He is more interested in how it came to an end in what is now called the Indian Revolution.

For many years after its founding Congress did not do very much. Its aim was to make the Raj give Indians some share in running the country: in other words, jobs in government. Since these would go to the members of Congress or their relatives, as an aim it was not very lofty. Although it was called a *National Congress*, it represented only a tiny fraction of the people, who were not really united in a nation anyway.

This tiny fraction contained yet another fraction. Like Viceroys they were odd, but powerful; like Viceroys they have passed into history, or out of it. They were Indians, but other Indians knew them as 'England-returned-men', and it was no compliment at all.

Pandit Nehru's father was a great patriot. He wished India to be free. All the same, he sent his son to England to be schooled, and his shirts to London to be laundered. He was quite right. Indian laundries were, and still are, bad; Indian education was worse. So London washer-women put English starch into the elder Nehru's shirts, and some British schoolmasters tried to do the same to his son. They failed with young Nehru, but they succeeded with a number of other sons of rich Indians. The Universities were equally successful, and soon were sending back a stream of doctors, lawyers, professors or idlers who were English gentlemen down to their underwear, but rather a sad mix-up under that.

Most of them liked England. India was then a stifling place, as I have shown. For a while they were free from the restrictions of caste and custom. While their freedom lasted, they enjoyed it. When they went back, they missed it sorely. When, in due course, they married the girl next door, as they had to, they became bad-tempered. They grew to dislike their country and its people, but found it difficult to cultivate their English rulers, who kept them out on the verandah and would not ask them in to dinner. It is this sort of person that English novelists described in their books about India. Some, like E. M. Forster, did it with sympathy; others with contempt. But both sorts left the impression behind that the Indian was a person who was most anxious to get along with the British. This was quite wrong. The vast majority of Indians did not give a social damn for the English, unless there was money in it.

But the Indian has always had an exaggerated respect for a learned man (the honorific title of Pandit only means 'a scholar') and these England-returned-men were clearly better educated than those who stayed at home. True, their eating habits had become promiscuous, their attitude towards the female sex had become loose, and they found it irksome to settle down into the bosom of their families. But they had read the books they talked about, or at least rubbed shoulders with people who had. Their learning was not confined to what it took to get through examinations, as it would have been had they stayed in India. Their English degree was respected, and so, as a result, were they. They soon began to play a dominating part in the National Congress, but they did nothing to turn that into a truly national body. They were not truly national themselves.

The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi changed all this. He was an England-returned-man himself, but so unchanged by the experience that he might never have gone there. Gandhi was not a demagogue: he took no trouble at all with his public speeches and often they were boring. But he had an instinctive feeling for the masses. Until



Gandhi, the Congress barely knew they existed. Perhaps they did not. Perhaps those vast crowds that listened to him, forgetting their divisions of caste and beliefs, were a creation of his powerful charisma. At any rate, they gave the impression that Gandhi spoke for the whole sub-continent, that he was the voice of 400,000,000 subject people.

He was not, and this fact plagued his whole life, and, in the end, brought about his death by an assassin's bullet. There were the Moslems, a people within a people, who began to feel uneasily that Gandhi, a Hindu, did not speak for them. Gandhi's dream of a free, united India seemed to them more of a nightmare, in which they were swallowed up by the Hindu majority. For a while, they were unsure of what they should do. As the negotiations with the Raj wore on, they fought for safeguards: fighting, that is, not the British but Gandhi. But Gandhi's whole power rested in the belief that he represented a nation, a vast place called India. It was essential, for him, that Hindus and Moslems (to say nothing of Christians and Sikhs and Parsees) all lived together in harmony. His powers of persuasion were enormous, his patience literally that of a saint. He might very well have succeeded.

But it was his ill luck to be challenged by a man who was quite impervious to his charisma. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, an elegant, gifted, and stubborn Moslem lawyer, looked upon the world with a very measured eye. He was not given to enthusiasms, not even for his own Moslem people, whose inertia he deplored as much as Vivekananda had deplored that of the Hindus. He was not awed by Gandhi, a man who had managed to awe the Viceroy. With great shrewdness he drew the Mahatma off of his high moral plane, which was his opponent's position of strength, down to the level of political bargaining, which was Gandhi's weakest point—possibly his only one. Both men were trained lawyers. Jinnah was the cleverer one. When Gandhi was denied his vast and spiritual vision and forced to argue, he would haggle. When he haggled, Jinnah told him that that was what he was doing. Moreover, he told the Moslems so. From that it was a short step to convince them that they could never be safe unless they had a country of their own. The Hindus could not be trusted.

The notion of Pakistan offended Gandhi's deepest feelings. It amounted to saying that his India did not really exist. But it *must* exist. In other words, there was a deadlock. The Raj, seeing this, with polished hypocrisy called conference after conference to solve it, though that was the last thing that it wanted to happen.

Then came World War II. The British Government offered India independence within the Empire if the Indians (which now meant the Mahatma) would support the war. Gandhi described this as a cheque drawn on a failing bank, and called, once more, for civil disobedience.

People did as they were told and went to jail. But, as I observed (and Nehru later confirmed), the spirit had gone out of it. Congressmen and their followers went to prison openly saying it was an essential step to get a job when the bank finally closed its doors. The mass of the people were hesitant. They had been confused by the long bargaining between Congress and the Moslems. They had no deep feelings about losing some bits of territory on the very edges of the land and calling it Pakistan. But, overwhelmingly, they felt they were somehow losing a



great historical chance. Great things were happening in the outside world. For a time they were convinced that Germany would win, and mine was the only public voice which said it would not, for which I was called a number of ugly names in the newspapers. But win or lose, surely now was the time to strike for freedom—to strike, and not to sit about in jails as they had been asked to do for a generation, and with nothing to show for it.

At this point a new figure came to the front, Subhas Chandra Bose, a name still virtually unknown in the West, but very much a hero to Indians, especially the young. Bose himself was young, in contrast to the ageing Gandhi. He was for violence, in contrast to Gandhi's pacifism, which had now become an Indian institution. He was not a Mahratta, but he had that fighting spirit which, as I pointed out at the beginning of the essay, is part of the Hindu character. A group formed round him, but for a while there was nothing practical they could do. Armed revolt seemed out of the question, for India was full of British troops.

Then Japan entered the war, and Subhas Chandra Bose saw his chance. In defiance of all logic (for Japan wished to invade India), he raised an army and went over to the Japanese. He was fighting, he said, not for the Japanese Empire, but to liberate India.

To the masses, the point was that he was *fighting*. Soon there was fighting everywhere: street riots broke out in the cities and forced the British to open fire. Trains were derailed, army stores set on fire, police stations assaulted. The ratings of the Royal Indian Navy locked their white officers in their cabins and trained their guns on the Yacht Club, the stronghold of white exclusiveness. Crowds poured into the harbour, cheering, laughing and singing, as though it were a festival. They rendered a bombardment impossible, but it did not matter. As we know, in the end it was not the guns that were fired, but the Raj.

'The story of the Indian National Army, formed in Burma and Malaya during war years, spread suddenly throughout the country and evoked an astonishing enthusiasm. The trial by court martial of some of its officers aroused the country *as nothing else had done*, and they became the symbols of India fighting for her freedom.'

Only the italics in that last paragraph are mine. The words are Pandit Nehru's.\*

\*Jawaharlal Nehru: *The Discovery of India*, p. 584 (1960 ed.).



Detail from a fabric in the Calico  
Museum in Ahmedabad







A sadhu giving a blessing at the entrance to the temple of Brihadiswara, in 99  
Tanjore. Indians regard sadhus—self-professed holy men—with mixed feelings.  
Some are genuine, some are opportunists, many are rogues playing on the  
sentiments of the ignorant

Indians, almost without exception, carry themselves with grace and their 100  
gestures, while few, have great delicacy. They find Western comportment  
boorish and Latin gesticulation exaggerated. Four examples follow: a boy dancer  
from a Kathakali group, illustrating the gesture which symbolizes the lotus.  
His mask, made of coloured rice paste, takes six hours to put on. The repertory  
of Kathakali dancers includes dancing stories from the epic poems, largely those  
concerned with the wars between gods and demons

A wandering sadhu from the west coast 101

A fortune-teller in the deepest south, at Kanya Kumari (Cape Comorin), 102  
photographed during a pilgrimage

A boatman from Kerala using a heavy bamboo pole 103













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- 104– A typical village festival, from Kerala. In Plate 104, we see the statue of the local  
106 god, protected by honorific umbrellas and fans. He is greeted by a band of  
local musicians (105) and preceded by drummers. Festival days are accompanied  
by tiny fairs, where itinerant vendors sell trinkets, gew-gaws and candy
- 107 A different sort of festival: Republic Day in New Delhi, when a procession is  
held that closely resembles an American parade. In the background can be seen  
Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Kosygin, Tito and his wife (26 January 1968)
- 108 Bathing on the Brahmaputra river, in Assam. The waters of this and the Ganges  
are considered holy by orthodox Hindus
- 109, A vast concourse of Sikhs during the annual Basaki festival at Amritsar.  
110 Indian pilgrimages can attract up to and over a million people, a fact which  
once struck wonder in Western observers. Nowadays, however, the crowds in  
St Peter's Square, Rome, regularly number 300,000, and they gather several times  
a year
- 111 One of the celebrated burning ghats at Varanasi (Banaras). Only people who  
actually die in the city are burned, but a vast number of devout Hindus of the  
old school arrange to have their ashes scattered on the river
- 112 A rare picture of a Jain woman worshipping at an altar. The mask over her  
mouth is to prevent her taking life by inhaling microbes and small insects (see  
Plates 4, 5)







# Women

I TALKED TO JAWAHARLAL NEHRU shortly before his death. At that time, Indians still loved him. He was still above criticism. Now, in the '70s, it is the fashion in India to say that he did nothing right, especially among the turbulent young, who blame all the frustrations of the country on him. Certainly it was a mistake to try to enforce the discipline of socialism upon a people rollicking in a freedom which had been denied them for centuries. One of his favourite phrases was, 'I do not know enough about the subject,' a modest undogmatic phrase straight out of intellectual coffee parties among the educated English. But there are times when a Prime Minister must know, or if he doesn't, say that he does and hope to God it comes out all right.

When I talked to him, I think he foresaw these criticisms. He was sad and subdued. Statesmen who know the end of their career cannot be far off usually talk like their own official biographers. Nehru did not. He seemed not so much tired, as tired of himself. Perhaps I was the wrong person for him to meet. V. K. Krishna Menon and I had been friends and colleagues when independence was a thing we still had to fight for. Prime Minister Nehru had fired Menon from his post as Defence Minister not long before and had not given him another one. As Menon said to me, sadly, 'Jawaharlal is a great man: but he is hard on his friends.' Maybe this was weighing on him, for we talked of Menon a good deal.

We talked of India, too, without noticeably raising his spirits. Then I asked him to name the greatest real advance that had been made since independence. He brightened immediately. 'The emancipation of women,' he said and for the first time, as he talked about it, he showed satisfaction.

It was certainly a remarkable feat, a world-historical act, as the Germans say, meaning it is something which in the long run will affect the destinies of all mankind in some degree. It was as bold as the act of Chairman Mao in destroying the Chinese family. That was something which needed to be done, and so was the emancipation of Indian women. Yet with all the other problems which faced the new India, Nehru could have let it wait. There was no mass pressure from the women; and any mass pressure from the men came in the opposite direction. But the laws went through, with painful slowness against bitter opposition, but they are on the statute book and they will never be removed. I think it was Nehru's personal desire to see them there that, in the end, got them through. When the clouds clear, it may be seen to be his greatest contribution to his country. It is a fitting monument to him that India should be the first great democracy in history to elect a woman as its Prime Minister.

Decoration from the central arch of the façade of Arhai-Din-Ka-Jhonpra, Ajmer. The representation of persons or animals being forbidden to Moslems, a calligraphic ornament was evolved, to great effect

When the Brahmins set up Hindu society, they did not say that a woman's place was in the kitchen—there was a special sub-caste of servants for that. But they made sure that she stayed at home. Since the family was the centre of their whole system, it was essential that the centre of the centre should stay put. A wife, therefore, had respect. But she had no rights as an individual. Everybody in the



system had duties. A woman's duty was to be utterly faithful and completely obedient to her husband. He was her whole world, and, almost literally, her very life. When he died, she retired to a corner of the house, put on miserable rags, denied herself every pleasure, and was treated with contempt or exasperation by the rest of the family, until she did what was impatiently expected of her, and died. Sutte was the psychopathological expression of all this. It was a hysterical outburst of a deep emotion, rare, but significant.

Now, a woman is not naturally devoted to her husband, and she is not automatically obedient to his wishes, especially when she can see he is a damned fool. But in India, she was. This was brought about by continuous propaganda. It centred round Sita, a figure in a long epic poem *The Ramayana*. Sita was the ideal wife. She was married to a hero of ancient times called Rama. Sita was the perfect spouse. She followed her husband into exile, walking the ritual few steps behind him. She was utterly devoted to him and completely faithful. She was abducted by a thoroughly bad man. In spite of his ardent advances, she remained—in the legend—faithful to her husband. The ravisher was justly killed. Sita returned to her husband.

India is a secular state: it says so in the Constitution. It occurred to me that a secular state should have some secular reading. I therefore retold the story of *The Ramayana*, removing the religious elements that the Brahmins had written into it, and reconstructing it as I thought the original writer had designed it. His name was Valmiki and he was one of those Indians who, as we have seen, rebelled against the Brahmin domination. I described Sita fairly enough as a good wife. But when it came to the end and she returned from her abductor to her husband, I pointed out that in the circumstances only one person could ever know if Sita had really been faithful, and that was Sita herself. In the legend, Sita is very nearly burned alive in a test by ordeal. But, as I said in the book, had she been burned to a cinder, it still would not have settled the question.

Now, I cannot imagine such a point of view annoying anybody except a husband who suspects he is a cuckold. Then, I agree, my little book could drive him slowly mad. Perhaps, indeed, it was a committee of such men who read it in New Delhi. At all events, they were so enraged that they succeeded in getting the book banned, on the grounds that it might cause riots. Since almost anything in India can cause a riot (it is a national sport) they may have been right. I only mention the matter to show how deeply the Hindu feels—or, rather, felt—about women.

The best way of avoiding the perplexity of Rama is to lock up your wife in the back quarters of the house and never introduce her to your male friends. This, more or less, was the fate of a true Hindu wife. She was rarely seen in public; and then only as a sort of shrinking timorous shadow of her husband. She had her compensations. While she did not open her mouth in public, she rarely shut it at home. Her husband was her lord and master, at least until he wanted to go to bed with her. So the Hindu wife could rule the roost if she wanted to. But her social life was confined to women.

The Constitution of independent India, however, made men and women equal before the law and gave both of them the vote. Now, you cannot ask your



equal to stay in the back quarters, and you cannot refuse to introduce your equal to your friends. How can you remain democratically minded and deny your daughter the education you insist on for your son? Thus, more and more, girls go to college and wives accompany their husbands when they meet their friends. The girls go to college—as girls go anywhere and everywhere—to find a husband; in some social circles a degree is more essential than a dowry. The wives go out in public to prove that their husbands are not backwoodsmen.

Often the wives are only backwoodswomen doing their best, and the result is comical. A typical reception in the rising middle classes goes somewhat in this fashion. The guest of honour is ushered into a room, where the others are assembled. At first glance, there is nothing unusual. Husbands and wives stand side by side and are introduced together. The guest takes up his position, and one of the wives, hitching her sari, comes over to talk. She wears a frank, open expression.

‘So pleased to meet you,’ she says. ‘I’ve been looking forward to it so much. When did you arrive?’

You tell her. Her expression becomes even more cordial.

‘When are you going?’ she says.

You tell her.

‘So soon?’ she says. ‘What a pity!’

‘Yes, it is,’ you reply.

‘Yes,’ she says.

‘Yes,’ you answer.

And that is that. The woman’s expression fades slowly away until she is turned to stone. She gives way, glassily staring beyond your ear, to another woman, who is beaming even more intensely.

‘At last we meet. So pleased,’ she says. ‘When did you arrive?’ You tell her and pull yourself together to make a greater conversational play. It is no use. She sticks to her lines, pities your early departure, and turns to stone. After a few minutes, five or six expressionless effigies are standing around you in a deathly silence. One feels as though one is the Gorgon.

A husband rescues you. A sigh of relief breaks from the effigies who hitch their saris and almost scamper to the end of the room, where they gather in a bunch and burst into noisy chatter.

Other husbands surround you; male conversation begins to flow, and from then on the room is as firmly divided between the sexes as if it were a public convenience.

Not all emancipated women are shy. Some of them are as efficient hostesses as can be found anywhere in the world. In fact, they have modelled themselves on what they have seen when their husbands took them abroad. One of them personally served me a well-cooked luncheon which she adorned with excellent conversation. The meal was served in a modern labour-saving kitchen. The dishes were prepared and ready to eat, save one, which she warmed herself on the electric stove in the manner of American housewives. But when the meal was finished, I was not required, as I might be in America, to help wash the dishes. That was unnecessary because the house had eight servants. None was visible. The lady of the house was in the height of fashion.

Nor do all Indian women like being emancipated. Kamala, for instance,



yearns to turn back the clock. She lived in one of the new suburbs of Calcutta built to house civil servants of a high grade, such as her husband. She was, I suppose, twenty-eight. She had two children. She was getting a little plump, but it was clear that in her own eyes she was the pert, vivacious and pretty girl she was at college.

Here again, the luncheon was for two only. But Kamala despises fashion. We ate at a dining table, and there was a servant to wait on us. The house was sparsely furnished, with nondescript pictures on the wall—the style preferred in the old India. The rooms were darkened with shutters. Fans beat and rattled over our heads, stirring up the wet, hot air. Kamala ignored her food but talked without stopping about herself, her women friends, her husband and the monotony of her life.

She spoke well in the style of the despairing heroines of French novels, popular some ten years ago, except that her Indian optimism peeked out every so often. She spoke of her yearning for a real, passionate love but was proud of the good job her husband had landed. She spoke of her circle of women friends—how they read books, gossiped, did good works and boasted.

‘Women only do things so that they can boast about them to their cronies,’ she said. Then, dreamily, ‘I shall say we were alone together, drinking beer.’ Beer is still a romantic drink in India. I grew a little alarmed.

‘How is Krishnan?’ I said.

‘My husband is very well,’ she said, drawing out the words. ‘He smiles and smiles and smiles.’

‘That sounds very amiable of him, Kamala.’

‘Amiable,’ she said. Then, with a sigh, ‘Yes. Amiable.’

‘I suppose you wish he would beat you?’

‘No,’ she said, thoughtfully. She half closed her eyes.

‘Then what do you want?’

‘An old-style Indian husband, a Malabar husband, a husband who is a lover who comes to me only after dark.’

This did not sound as strange to my ears as it might to another’s. In the very old-fashioned families of Malabar, the wife stays with her mother and the husband (for this is a matriarchy) visits the wife.

‘He would bring a lamp,’ she whispered. ‘I have one here.’ She rose and glided to a table on which stood a brass oil lamp a foot long and shaped like a boat. She picked it up. Some little chains on it rattled. She turned around and advanced slowly upon me.

‘He would come to me in the dead of night as I lay on my bed, the lamp in his hands. There would be a little flame, one little flame in the darkness. He would steal into my room. I would say to myself, “I hear the tinkling of the lamp. My lover is coming.”’

She was standing over me now, the lamp in her hands, her eyes mistily gazing at me. ‘It would be beautiful,’ she whispered.

I scraped back my chair. ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘but supposing you were tired and said, “Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, every damn night of the week!”’

I was immediately sorry. The luncheon party was in ruins. But on leaving, which I did as decently soon as I could, I reflected that she would not mention my blunder to her friends. I imagined her, in her soft voice: ‘We drank beer. We spoke of love, and lovers who come by night.’



I hoped she would have a success. She was an interesting woman and very hospitable. It was with great difficulty that I prevented her from making me a present of the lamp.

## *The Monstrous Nest*

INDIA HAS THUS BEGUN TO LIBERATE WOMEN from the tyranny of men. But India has another task, which is even more important for a truly civilized life. She has to liberate men from the tyranny of women. That, also, has begun.

As I am about to describe a very dark side of Indian life—the family—it is only fair that I should first point out that for centuries India has had in its midst the most advanced, open-minded and unprejudiced community to be found anywhere in the world, even in California. A group known as the Muria turn their adolescent sons and daughters out of the house as soon as puberty has arrived. They are sent to live together, boys and girls, in a sort of hostel. The boys and girls mingle freely and sleep side by side. Boys choose their girls, or vice versa, and they make love together at night. Going steady is permitted, but thought rather dull. Usually, these happy adolescents have several affairs until it is time to leave the hostel and marry.

Unfortunately, the Muria are what is known as a scheduled tribe—a group of primitive people who are considered little better than savages and who are looked after by a special government department. Their admirable example has therefore no effect on the rest of the country.

Outside this happy band of free souls\* the picture is very different. Vast numbers of Hindus live under a monstrous arrangement known as the Joint Family, a nightmare backed up by all the majesty of Hindu Law. It has done more harm to India even than the Brahmins, who were not (I think) actively responsible for it.

By this, when a boy marries one of the very restricted set of caste-worthy girls, he brings her back to his own family, and they live under the same roof. When his sons marry, they do the same thing. If the enormous nest gets over-full, some lucky lads may be able to break away and live on their own. Even so, if they are to be well thought of, their hearts must still belong to Daddy, and they will assiduously frequent the family house all of their lives.

They have to: and this is where the law steps in. The family property is held jointly. It is administered by the head of the household and his decisions are final. The head of the house is that male member who is the oldest still in possession of his faculties, usually the father, but sometimes the eldest surviving son. In some families (my own, for instance, until a few years ago) this arrangement is even more bizarre. There the family property, still joint, is handed down through the *female* line. The women are still not allowed to manage it, but they legally own it, and with some determined old women, that is by no means allowed to remain a legal fiction.

For the vast majority of middle-class Indians, property means land, usually devoted to agriculture. Besides this, there are the family jewels, accumulated

\*For more, see Verrier Elwin, *The Muria and Their Ghotul*.



maybe for three generations as a hedge against inflation. There will also be some gold hidden away, the Indians being for centuries the biggest buyers of gold in the world, till nowadays, when everybody who can is prudently following their example. It is thus immobile wealth, with father or grandmother sitting firmly on top of the family chest.

Indian families are no more loving than families anywhere else. Yet the young must, perforce, live cheek by jowl with the old, and if they want any money, or capital, they must endure interminable arguments and, worse, good advice, exactly like a schoolboy asking for more pocket money.

All this, plainly, would frequently erupt into brawls and mayhem, if it were not for the fact that children are brought up to have an exaggerated respect for all the older members of the family—the tribal council of old men and women, so to speak. Until recently, a son would not sit down in the presence of his father or grandfather until specifically asked to do so.

And here perhaps I might be allowed an aside to Westerners. Most people outside India comment on the beauty of Indian manners. In company the Indian is courteous and self-effacing. That is because he learned at home that if he were not he would rapidly get a swinging clout round the ears. People who know a number of Indians have also noted that while comporting themselves in a most flattering manner, they will suddenly blurt out something which is downright rude, wearing, all the while, an expression of complete innocence. In a word, they act like little boys. Indeed, those Indians who have been brought up in one of these vast joint families do often remain little boys for the major part of their lives.

The joint family system has an even worse effect on the male character. Since a young man will live in contact with the females who brought him up from the cradle, he falls under petticoat influence to a marked degree. Houses are run by women, whatever men like to say. An Indian's world is often a woman's world. His wife may yield to his authority as a Hindu wife must. But when his back is turned, she has only to go and complain to his mother, or his aunts, or his nurse, and they will do all the arguing necessary. Indian family rows frequently take that most maddening of lines: 'You always were untidy' or 'You always were careless about money' or 'You always were an obstinate brat: I should have spanked you more.'

In theory, a joint family could agree to divide up its property into just shares, each member thenceforth going his or her own way. In practice, it was such a complicated affair that it might consume a whole lifetime of disputes. Inevitably at some point one member would go to law, and Hindu law on the subject was designed to preserve the joint family, not break it up. The rules were so complicated that only an expert could find his way through them. Expert lawyers costing what they cost, it often turned out in the end that there was precious little left to divide.

That has been altered in the new India. Sensible laws have been passed and the younger members of a joint family can now ask that it be divided without being made to feel that they are tearing down the pillars of society. My own Kerala family has been divided and they now live scattered over the face of India. Their children will grow up with no other female influence save that of their mother



and their nurse. When their father dies, they will merely open a normal will and inherit their own birthright. They will grow up to be men much more quickly.

But I must admit they will miss some fun. Joint family rows were monumental and quite unaffected by the passage of time. They usually stemmed from the fact that the family purse had been dipped into for some favourite son or daughter, leaving the rest of the family with an enduring sense of having been swindled. My father, for instance, alone of all the other brothers, was sent to England to study, a very expensive business, which he owed to his youthful charm and wit. Thirty years later I received a letter from an uncle which began, 'Dear nephew, I hear you have returned to India, and I send you my blessings. My egregious younger brother, your father . . .'

## *The Bosses*

I MAY HAVE GIVEN, SO FAR, THE IMPRESSION that when India became free its government was taken over by a band of farsighted reformers, burning with patriotic zeal to strike off the shackles of the past. There were a few such people, and they did rather expect to run the country. What actually happened was that in the stampede for office, they were driven to the wall.

When, to use a simile, the music stopped and everybody made a grab for a chair, the odd man out without one was often seen to be these very reformers. The people sitting very firmly on the chairs were a type known as the Congress politician. For the next two decades it was these who ran the country. Nehru frequently said that having to deal with them every day was a scourge. But he was a politician himself and he had no wish to destroy his own party. So he put up with them, and so did the country. The reformers, after getting their breath back, found themselves seats on commissions and committees, and in due course, reforms, as we have seen, did get under way, though often in the teeth of bitter opposition from the Congress politicians. The reform of the status of women took over six years to get through this and become the law of the land.

The Congress political boss wears a dhoti, what is now called in the West a 'Nehru' jacket, and the familiar 'Gandhi' cap. This is called 'national dress', though Indians, in fact, wear every conceivable garment, from a breech-clout to Brooks Brothers or Savile Row style suiting. The Gandhi cap is, in fact, not Indian at all, being a version of the natty pillbox caps in which Queen Victoria dressed her soldiers, and which took the Indian fancy.

So much for the externals. But to know what a Congress boss is really like, he must be seen in his proper setting, which is not New Delhi, where he is often ill at ease, but back home, at his grass roots.

One day in Calcutta I missed my plane for Bombay, and I was forced to cross the country by night. I took the lumbering, antique mail plane from Calcutta to Bombay. From sunset to dawn, the dark and empty stretches of India rolled past beneath me. Every so often, the plane came down into the thick heat of the night



and left its bags of mail at provincial airports. One of them was a rich town in the central plains.

I stumbled stiffly from the aircraft, sweating and crumpled. The Indian night, always vast, seemed bigger than ever as I made my way across the airfield. It was half past two in the morning, but the terminal swarmed with people. Some were taking planes, others were there to wish them Godspeed; but there were still others, and it was these who first took my attention. They were peasants. They leaned on the rails, squatted on the ground and even sprawled on it. They had come to the city to do their business; now it was night and they had come to watch the planes fly in and out, to marvel at the rich passengers, to enjoy the red and green and white lights, and to doze a little. Whoever rules India, rules, above all, these peasants.

I made my way to a restaurant in the airport building. It was squalid, but full. Men leaned on tables and slept, their heads in pools left over from glasses of lime juice and cups of tea. Others yawned, belched, scratched themselves and cracked their knuckles to pass the time. Then the arrival of a plane was announced over the tinny loudspeakers. Immediately the restaurant was emptied. I followed the men out into the night and stood behind them as they crowded the barrier. There were about a hundred people in the group. They were silent. Two held garlands. We waited and, over the crowded airport, there rose that strange, sharp, pervading smell of human bodies that one meets only in the tropics, an odour like that of wet, living fur—neither pleasant, nor repulsive, but subtly disquieting.

I asked who was to receive the garlands. I was told it was a local politician, a member of the Congress Party. His name was small in Delhi, but big here.

He was soon among us. He was slight, grey and dull in expression. He was dressed in the regulation long white jacket and saucy cap. He had a very large belly.

He was garlanded. He was smiled at, but he did not smile back. The peasants gazed in wonder. A peasant, sprawling on the ground, was shaken awake by a companion. He looked at the scene with eyes and mouth wide open, a fold of his turban straggling over his forehead.

We all moved processionally through the dirty restaurant, the great man in front. He turned his head and looked us over. Every so often, he would catch a greeter's eye. Instantly, the man would salute him. The great man would nod. Once or twice he smiled, and then the fortunate person he was looking at would jerk his hands up and down two or three times, bobbing his head in a renewed salute.

Slowly, very slowly, we made our way to the great man's car. He was installed. He lowered the window. Three greeters crowded their heads into the window. He spoke to them. They beamed. Then the car drove off and all the welcomers stood and stared after it till their eyes watered.

Who were they? Little men, shopkeepers, merchants, teachers, and with them a sprinkling of youths brought there by their fathers. The great man had noticed us all, one by one, even myself, whom he looked through without a flicker of his eyes. He noted those who were there and, undoubtedly, those who were not.

In the morning, the welcomers would come to his house, sip tea with him and ask him for favours—a licence for cement, the remission of some penalty, a contract, a job, a letter of recommendation for a son. India is the country of



letters of recommendation. He would distribute favours and promises to the fortunate, who would go away happy. He would rebuff others, who would go away resigned. There would be nothing to do about it. This is the way that India was run for millennia and still is run today.

I returned to the restaurant and picked up a newspaper. At the bottom of the page was an advertisement for good-luck charms, priced from a few cents to ten dollars. The cheap ones brought success in affairs of the heart and in examinations. The most expensive one was recommended as particularly potent. 'It brings', said the advertisement, 'the power to win the favour of high officials.'

Still, India was changing. The Congress politician had thrived on a strain of flunkeyism in the Indian character, and that had its source in caste, which, if it is taken seriously, calls for the soul of a flunkey in three-quarters of the population. But the reformers had shaken caste. The untouchables had their vote like any other citizen. The reformers had thrown open the doors and windows of the joint family households. Young men and women were emerging from them into the world, and finding they could think for themselves, instead of thinking like Father. Admittedly, they still left a lot of thinking to Father Nehru up in New Delhi, but when he died, it was different.

All over the country, Indians, and especially young Indians, began to take a closer look at the bosses. Many of them, so long in power, were corrupt. Under Nehru, corruption had been regularly deplored, but as regularly accepted as something that made the wheels go round. Now it was seen for what it was—thieving. Hungry and jobless young men, who could not get favours from the bosses, began to ask why they should be necessary. As young men are doing all over the world, they protested by joining new political parties, either of the extreme right, or the Communists.

Then the impossible happened. The bosses were outvoted and lost control of one after another of the provincial governments. They still held power in New Delhi, but when the time came for them to stir themselves and re-assert their sway over the rest of India, it was found that Congress had gone flabby. The bosses were inert. In 1969, when Indira Gandhi was asked if she did not feel that a woman lacked the stamina for high office, she replied, with an obvious reference to the party men: 'I don't know about women, but I do know that I've got more stamina than anyone around here.'

And so have the young rebels—stamina, and time.



## Time and Tomorrow

TIME, YES: but these young people will have their own sort of time. Their watches are going faster every year: soon they will be in step with Western watches. Things will go at a Western pace, and that, above all things, is what the young Indian wants. This is the final thing that I wish to explain about India in this essay.

It may be recalled that my friend Bala taught me a lesson about Indian thinking while we threw stones at an alligator. Shortly afterwards I went back to England, grey skies, school and pragmatic English schoolboys. I missed Bala very much. I wondered if I would ever see him again, and I decided, sadly, that I would not.

I began to miss much else, above all the way of life where my family lived. There was never any hurry. Nobody had a wristwatch. The servants rose, cooked meals and went to bed by the sun; my uncles would come to see me when they pleased. They had infinite time to talk to me. One taught me geometry, because he liked Euclid's theorems, and hoped—but did not insist—that I liked them, too. Another took me to see some dancers who danced a story from *The Ramayana*, beginning when they pleased in the evening, and going on through the night until it was almost time for the sunrise. Nobody was ever in a hurry, nobody made appointments, and I was never expected to be on time. Leisureliness was everything.

Sometimes, in England, I would have a dream. It was always the same. I was walking towards a range of high hills. My intention was to cross them, on foot, and then walk back to India. I would wake up, and if it were early morning, I would rise, dress, and walk in a nearby park, straight across it until I came to a paddock with some Indian deer. I would feed them, until it made me late for school.

But I was only a boy. I did not know that all that ease and leisure came from the fact that my charming uncles did not a stroke of work. They had been landowners for generations. Peasants tilled the fields for them, or gathered up the coconuts, or picked the pepper that had been exported from this countryside since the time of the Caesars. Rent collectors collected the rent and gave it to my uncles who had nothing to do but stroll over to my verandah and teach me geometry. I do not remember any of them mentioning the people who did all this for them, except, of course, the rent collectors. So I do not know if the peasants were in debt.

Millions upon millions of other peasants were. The rent had to be paid to the landowners whether the crops prospered or failed. In the north, at one time, the landowners even collected the taxes for the Raj, keeping a little for themselves for their trouble. The village moneylender was always available for those peasants who had fallen upon hard times. He also asked a little for his trouble: about 200 per cent per annum.



Clearly, in such a well-thought-out system there was no need of hurry. Time did not matter, except, of course, rent day for the peasants, and they did not have to worry about keeping track of that. They would be reminded.

More than two-thirds of India lived in this way. It produced that calm in the upper- and middle-class India which was so much admired by sympathetic Western observers. 'How much better it is', they said and wrote, 'than all our rush and tear! There is a spiritual quality about the Indians from which we can well learn.'

The spiritual quality (and 200 per cent per annum) lasted for centuries, first under the Hindus, then under the Moslems, and lastly under the Raj. Then came independence and the reformers tackled the scandal. The vast properties of the landowners were divided among the peasants who at last had something they could call their own. The government set up banks that lent money without sucking the borrower's blood. The landowners, with their compensation, went into business.

That, at least, is the scheme of things that the reformers drew up. Parts of it have been carried out: much remains to be done. The country is vast, the landed gentry is ingenious: the peasant has not yet learned to use his vote as effectively as he uses his hoe.

But the spiritual calm of India has gone forever. I did see Bala again. He was a middle-aged man. For a few moments, as we shook hands at the brand-new airport, we were boys again. Then, as we drove away in the car, he asked me if I would mind addressing a small gathering of prominent locals. These would be the sons, I reflected, of those leisurely men who had so charmed my youth. I said I would be happy to oblige. (Of course. Had not Bala *always* got his own way with me?) As we drove through the fields and past the palm trees that I so well remembered, he said that the meeting would take place at 8 P.M. the following evening. The members would be very pleased if I could tell them about the Italian economic boom: how had it started? How had the Italians managed it? Were there any hints or tips for Kerala? I promised to do my best, and asked what was the name of the organization?

'Rotary,' said Bala.

Then we arrived at the hotel of which he was now the owner, and he showed me to my air-conditioned room.

The meeting was lively: the businessmen brisk and well-informed. It began precisely at 8 P.M.

Bala is dead. He will not see the new India that he was helping to build. But his children will. For the Westerners who think of India as a romantic place, and its people a people apart, the new generations of Indians are going to be hard to swallow. But maybe it is worth while to seek them out. They are easy to find. They are in the universities of the United States, and Great Britain and Germany and Russia and every place where they can learn to make steel, produce plastics, handle computers, prospect for oil, manage businesses and make the money their country so desperately needs. Take them to your comfortable Western homes. Do not seek immemorial wisdom from them. Show them your latest model deep freezer.







# To a Young Man Going West

MY DEAR NARAYAN: I had just finished an essay introducing Western readers to the new India when your letter arrived telling me that you are leaving Kerala to go to America (you must call it 'The States', by the way, when you get there) and that you mean to study chemical engineering. I don't really know what that is, but I remember your telling me some time back that you thought there would be a fortune in fertilizers, so I imagine it is a step towards your boyhood dreams.

Let me see: you must be 23 now, 24 perhaps. You ask for my advice about living in the States, but you're quite old enough to manage by yourself on most things. Still, I think you will be in for some surprises.

Your father dislikes America, as you must be tired of hearing by now (congratulations on disobeying him: he must think the world is coming to an end). I remember he once told me that Nehru was at a dinner party there and one of his hosts said to him, 'Mr Prime Minister, are you aware that sitting around this table tonight is twenty thousand million dollars?' Nehru was very upset at such gross materialism. You, I imagine, would lick your chops and wonder how you could cut yourself a small slice of it to finance your fertilizer factory. But the trouble is you're never likely to hear it. The Americans have changed since then. Nowadays *they* worry about gross materialism.

I know the way you like getting things down to earth, and I think you are going to find this change very irritating. But you are going to get a lot of it, especially among people of your own generation. Perhaps I can give you some help in the matter.

First, you will get a lot of sympathy for India because its people are so poor. You will have to agree that this is so, but you will want to say something constructive, as well. Now the only way to stop Indians being poor is to build factories (like yours), introduce the latest machinery, use the latest techniques and produce, produce, produce. That, after all, is why you have come to America, for the Americans have built the greatest productive civilization in the history of mankind.

At this point your American friends will start looking worried, and the younger they are the more worried they will be. They will agree that they have invented a great producing civilization ('a consumer culture', they will call it) but they will insist that they don't like it. They will say that they would be sorry to see India going the same way.

But if India doesn't go the same way, Indians will stay poor and starving. You will certainly point this out and you will be quite right. But you will get the infuriating reply that your friends think it is a *crime* for people to be starving in the midst of plenty and the rich nations should send more and more aid to the poor ones as their moral *duty*.

Yet if Indians ought not to use this aid to set up a producer-consumer civilization on American lines, what *are* they to do with it? Put the dollar bills on pieces of string and hang them round their necks? Some really good, kind, generous



Americans do think that way. You will have seen in your newspaper that recently an American so loved the people of Madras and was so sorry for them that he walked through the streets giving everybody he met a ten dollar note. I trust you did not laugh. That is the American conscience at work. Just now it is working overtime because the Negroes have pointed out that if the white Americans want to take their consciences for a walk they don't have to go to Madras. They can go straight down Main Street to the local ghetto.

Now I know how sceptical you are and I fancy that you will begin to think that all this rejection of the values of a consumer civilization is just a bit bogus. After all, the Americans who don't like the way of life they have evolved could always walk out of it, like the Indians in the old days who took the saffron robe and became hermits. Only a very tiny minority do that, and they need drugs to keep up their rebel spirits. The majority stay firmly put. When you join your university, go to the cafeteria and watch your fellow-students putting the detested products of the consumer civilization in their mouths. They eat like Brahmins at a wedding.

What is the real reason behind it all? I shall tell you. The West has so far lorded it over the browns, the yellows and the blacks because of its superior mastery of technology. They had the know-how and they were secure in it. But recently, in a squabble on the frontier of China, some big-mouth on the Russian radio warned the Chinese that the Russian missiles were tipped with nuclear weapons. So, replied the Chinese, are ours. What answer could the Russians have to that? At best they could challenge the Chinese to come outside and fight it out on the moon.

There you have the key to the whole matter. The triumphs of technology have become absurdly easy to copy. Know-how no longer resides in the brain of a technician. It is programmed into a computer. When I was your age, it was a great joke among the British that the 'Japs' could copy anything. Now that the Japanese are closing down British shipyards because they are corralling all the orders, it is not considered funny at all.

In a generation, perhaps even less, the only claim that the West has to be superior to the rest of the world will be gone. That, from the Western point of view, will be bad enough. But there is more to come, especially for America. As you well know, with each technological advance, the Americans are getting more leisure. A vast industry has already grown up to cope with it. The Americans have always been gifted in inventing entertainments, from the days of the Mack Sennett movies onwards. With all the world demanding to be amused for longer and longer hours, the land of Edison and the first skyscrapers may become a leader again, but in setting fads which the rest of the world will eagerly copy.

I am not inventing this comic prospect. It has already happened, in a small way. After World War II, Great Britain found herself a small country, leading the world in nothing at all. It rankled, but it seemed that nothing could be done about it. Then four boys from the Liverpool slums grew their hair, put on wild clothing, and wrote some songs. Soon, right around the globe, people were talking of Britain once again. That, I may assure you, has rankled worse than ever.

So there is the cause of the present discontent you will find in America. You have been brought up in a country which had grown used to being the under-dog for centuries. You know what a deep mark that has left on your elders, and



even some of your own generation. To be top-dog marks even more deeply. The West you are coming to knows that the days of its supremacy are numbered, and it is people like you who are impatiently counting them. Do not wonder if sometimes intelligent people give you a long, thoughtful look.

Stop off at Rome on your way to Los Angeles and come to see me. I shall not show you the Forum, but I shall show you the remarkable things that Nervi is doing with stressed concrete. It may give you a hint or two for when you come to build your factories for fertilizers.

Affectionately,

A.



A Rajput peasant, with the typical clean-cut features and keen glance of his race 113







- 114 Planting out rice in a field underneath the Western Ghats. Done under a burning sun, it is one of the hardest tasks that a human being can set his hand to.
- 115 A toddy-tapper in a rice field on the road to Cape Comorin. Toddy, which ferments into an alcoholic drink, is drawn from the stems of the palm leaves. The climber has put his feet in a loop of rope

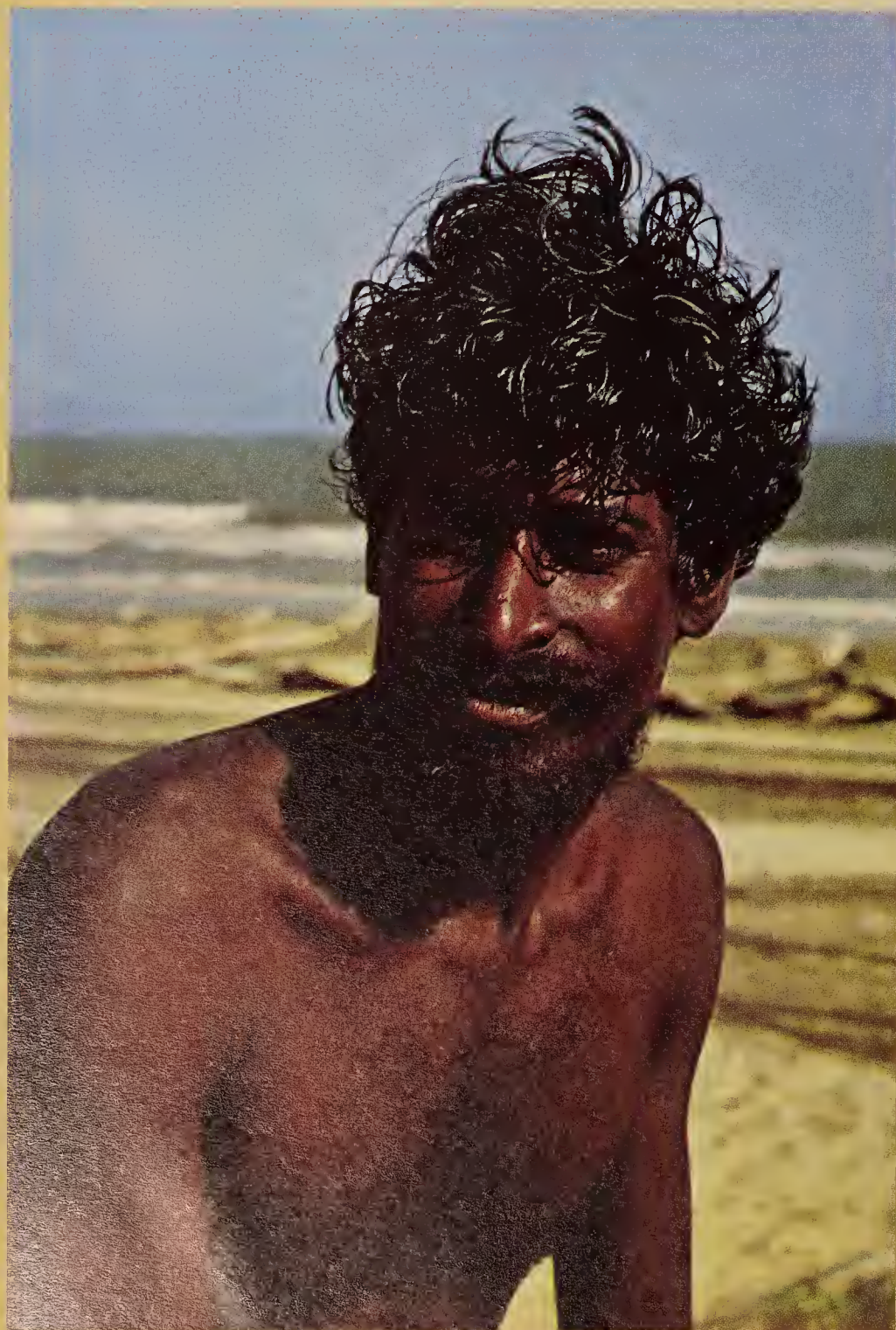








- 116 A fisherman from the Coromandel coast. It is widely believed in India (though not proven) that the dark-skinned Southerners are descendants of the original inhabitants of India, before the coming of the Aryans
- 117 A fishing village on the Arabian Sea at Kovalum. Fishermen are a highly independent people, with their own customs, religious rites and morality. Indians, as a whole, however, have no fondness for the ocean, which millions never see in their whole lifetime



116











- 118 Pilgrims resting on the steps of the great temple at Rameshwaram. Besides its religious value, a pilgrimage in India is something of a holiday and a break from household routine
- 119 Produce on sale at Mandu. The most ordinary Indian meal calls for a wide range of vegetables and herbs, and shopping is complicated





120 Dyeing cloth in the river bed of Ahmedabad, a thriving industrial city, whose Corbusier-inspired skyline can be seen in the background. Handicrafts are practised cheek by jowl with modern factories









- 121 A sacrifice of pigeons and baby goats at the shrine of Kamakhya in Gauhati, the capital of Assam. This picture was taken at the festival of Bahag Bihn, or ceremony connected with the Spring. The sacrifice of animals disgusts the vast majority of Hindus and moves are continually being made to have it prohibited by law. The custom, however, still persists in isolated spots. It is probably a survival from animist cults that were in existence even before the Aryans
- 122 One of the most familiar sights in India—the travelling vendor, whose ‘shop’ consists of a cloth spread on the ground. Here, in Varanasi on the Ghats, he is selling artificial stones for making trinkets and coloured powders used for festival decoration and women’s cosmetics









- 123 Apparently an ordinary bazaar, these stalls are inside the Rameshwaram temple, in the State of Tamil Nadu (Madras). A brisk trade goes on, attending to the needs of the pilgrims. (See plate 118)





- 124 A wedding between two aristocratic Rajput families. The bridegroom is at home, receiving the good wishes of relatives. He will be taken in procession to meet the bride for the ceremony, the climax of which comes when the bride and bridegroom take three ritual steps together











- 125 A village child in Rajasthan. Small children, both boys and girls, are often allowed to run about naked, especially in rural communities. Hindu children are not unduly petted, but they have great freedom, subject only to obeying the head of the household, if and when he gives an order
- 126 Two cheerful prostitutes in the red light quarter in Bombay. Hindus have never had any great moral prejudice against prostitutes. In ancient times, some prostitutes rose to great positions and influence
- 127 A destitute boy begging on the great Howrah bridge in Calcutta, a city of unparalleled poverty and squalor, which nevertheless, produces some of the most gifted people in the Indian scene





128 In some parts of India, the women enliven their usually austere houses with patterns made by sifting coloured powders over paper patterns, and adding fresh flowers to the design. It is done at the major festivals, and the women take considerable pride in their skill. In this case the design is being made in the middle of the living-room floor





129 As every reader of *A Thousand and One Nights* knows, the Moslems are fond of such flowers as jasmine and the rose. Here a boy sells them outside a mosque in Bombay









130 Card-playing is a passion in India, the cards being slapped down in a challenging fashion, as the man, third from the left, is about to do. The players are mahuts for the elephants which are used to take visitors up the steep paths to the palace of Amber, Jaipur (see plate 71)

131 Evening. The Presidential Guard beats the Retreat in front of the President's Palace, New Delhi. They are the last remnant of the pomp that surrounded the Viceroy, in an increasingly workaday India





Cattle being led in the evening to fresh water to cool themselves after the heat of the afternoon. The short Indian twilight is the most pleasant and relaxed time of the day



# EPILOGUE





It is the hour for a gossip at the well among the women drawing water for the 13  
evening meal . . .











134 . . . or for a swim at dusk in the placid waters of a lake like this one in the  
Palace at Dig

(Overleaf) The syllable AUM, an  
exclamation used at the beginning and  
end of prayers, or written at the  
beginning of books. It has always been  
considered to have a deep mystical  
significance, and to be an aid to  
meditation. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*,  
Krishna sums up his powers as Creator  
and Lord of the Universe by saying,  
'I am the single syllable AUM'  
(ch. 10: 25)







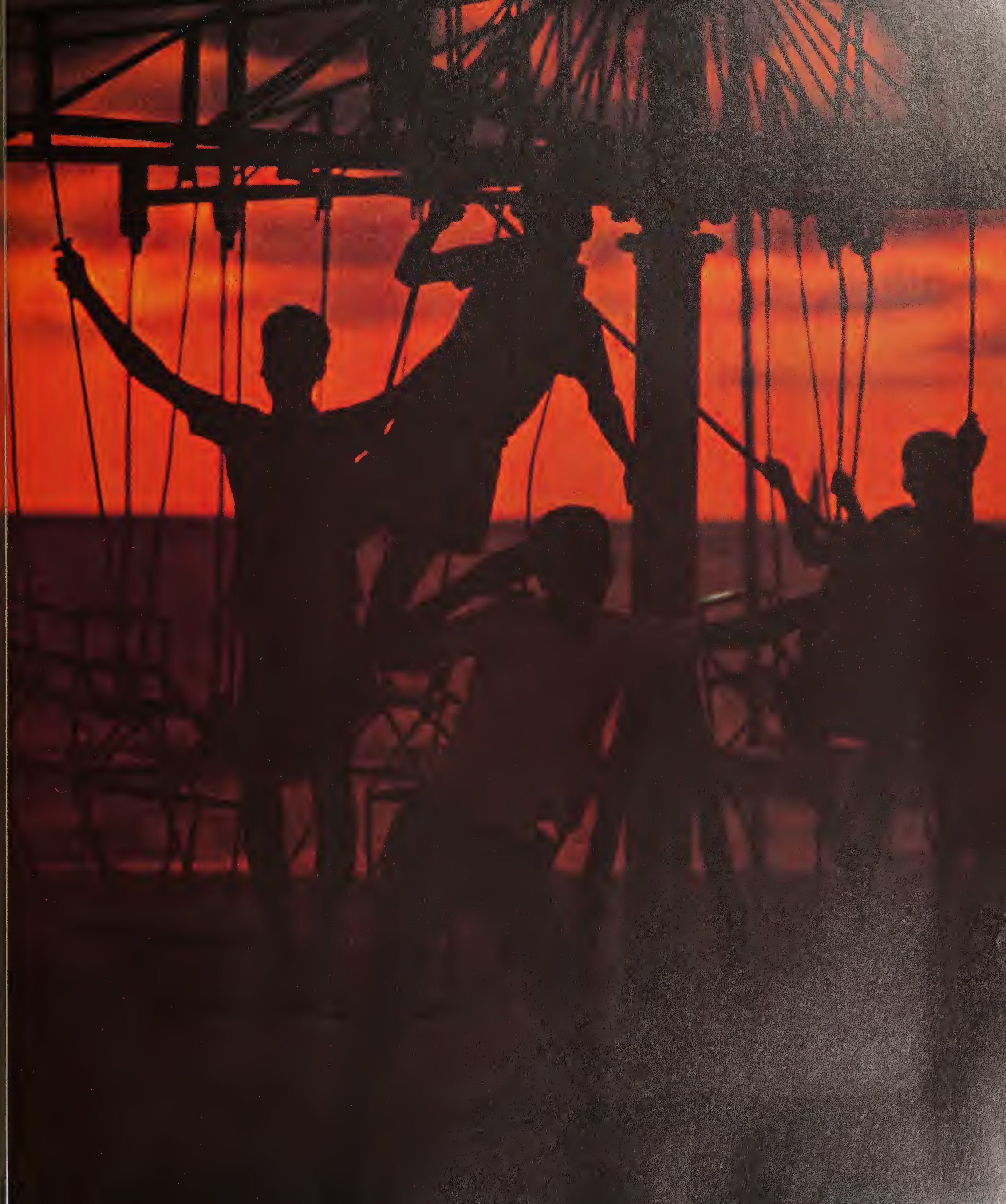
*But, after all, who knows, and who can say  
whence it all came, and how creation happened?  
The gods themselves are later than creation,  
so who knows truly whence it has arisen?*

*Whence all creation had its origin,  
he, whether he fashioned it or whether he did not,  
he, who surveys it all from highest heaven,  
he knows—or maybe even he does not know*



Panjim, Goa. Children play against the red sunset over the Arabian Sea 135















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